

Dubuque Little League World Series Team Selection Process:

There have been a lot of questions and concerns about the selection process, and there probably always will be. However, there is no reason why the process needs to be a mystery. I am therefore going to take this opportunity to try and explain the process that we use to select the LLWS teams from Dubuque. Most of this explanation really only deals with the younger kids... the Junior level is handled slightly differently due to the lower number of kids playing. The Juniors are covered specifically at the end of this document.

Background: Dubuque Little League actually consists of two Little League Charters... North and South. The league used to consist of three charters, but we finally successfully dissolved the old Central charter. Each charter covers a geographical portion of the city of Dubuque, plus a portion of surrounding Dubuque county. The old Central charter was dissolved and absorbed into the North and South charters. The new map is being posted on the website so that folks can see the revised charter boundaries as they now exist.

(In the past we had 3 teams in the 9-10 year old division and 3 teams in the 11-12 year old division, one for each charter at each level. At the conclusion of the 2007 season, many parents (and coaches) from the Dubuque Central charter addressed the board and asked us to dissolve Central and go with just the two remaining charters (North and South). This request was based upon the experience of the Central kids and parents over the past several years and the inability to put a truly competitive team on the field from the Central due to the lower number of kids living in the Central charter area.)

Current Situation: In order to allow as many kids as possible to participate on the LLWS teams, we are fielding 2 teams in the 9-10 year old division, 2 teams in the 10-11 year old division, and 2 teams in the 11-12 year old division (one for each charter at each available level of play). 10 year olds will be eligible to play on both the 9-10 year old team, and the 10-11 year old team. Likewise, 11 year olds will be eligible to play on both the 10-11 year old team and the 11-12 year old team. However, a player can actually only play on one team (so some players may have to make a choice). We believe that this plan will allow Dubuque Little League to put more competitive teams on the field at all three levels of play, while still allowing just as many kids the opportunity to play.

Cost of Participating in LLWS play: (NEW!!) Each child who plays on a LLWS team will need to contribute \$50 toward the cost of the child's uniform and team expenses. At the conclusion of play, the child will keep their LLWS team uniform (which will have his/her name on the back). As with our registration fee for the regular season, we will make exceptions for families that are experiencing financial hardship. It is not our intention to prevent anyone from playing due to the added cost. However, the LLWS teams are a significant expense for Dubuque Little League. We believe that it is vitally important for our league to continue participating in LLWS play, but we need to find ways to offset the costs. One of the largest costs is the uniforms which are higher quality and a little more expensive than our regular season uniforms. The problem is that many of them are not returned at the end of the LLWS tournament, which means we have to purchase a lot of new uniforms the following year. In order to offset this cost in the future, we are simply

going to personalize the uniforms and have the children pay for them and keep them. In addition, if a team advances beyond District play (which has only ever happened in the Juniors so far), there will be additional travel and accommodations expense for several days while the teams participate in the State level of play. We have never made it that far in the past, but at some point it will happen. Our teams have come close several times. At the Regional level of play (above State), Little League International starts picking up much of the travel expense involved in participation, and will even provide new equipment to participating teams. (That is the level at which TV coverage starts). Of course, that does not really help with coaches and parents having to miss work... since none of us are likely to send our 10-12 year old kids halfway across the country without a parent along. It should be noted that the 9-10 year old teams do not advance beyond the State level of play.

Open Tryouts: A couple years ago, we started holding open tryouts for the LLWS teams. Players do not have to attend the tryouts to be considered for the teams, and the coaches will consider a player's performance over the season in addition to what they see at the tryouts. Primarily, the tryouts are to give the coaches an opportunity to get another look at the kids in case we didn't see them at their best when we played against them, and in case someone has improved since we played them. The primary consideration will always be a player's performance during the course of the season. That cannot be ignored. To assist in this process, we ask that players wear their uniform shirts to the open tryout so that coaches can identify players that they do not know personally. It is true that for the most part coaches know who they are looking at during tryouts, but players can catch a coach's eye at tryouts. And that does happen. Several kids have been placed on a LLWS tournament team because of what coaches saw at tryouts, in addition to the kids' performance over the course of the season.

The Player Selection Process: Right after the open tryouts, the coaches meet to discuss the players and select a team. For the majors, this is done on the Monday evening following tryouts, and for the minors, this is done on the Tuesday evening following tryouts. Attendance at these meetings is restricted to regular season head coaches or their designated representative, and league officials, and the 10-11 year old LLWS team coaches. The coaches from each division all sit down and discuss the players on their respective teams. This usually takes an hour or more, as coaches discuss and make recommendations regarding players. There are no specific criteria required to be considered, but it certainly includes a player's skill level, concentration level, attitude, leadership skills, and even skills at particular positions. After the discussion of all the players is complete, the coaches then go around the table and nominate players for consideration. There is no limit to the number of players that a coach can nominate, and they are not restricted to nominating players from their own teams. However, the list of nominated players is usually not real long, somewhere around 20 kids from all of the eligible kids in the charter(s). The coaches then each vote for 9 players from the list of nominated players. This is a confidential vote by written ballot. The 6 players receiving the most votes are then automatically on the team (if they are deemed eligible by Little League International). This process is repeated for each LLWS team at the 9-10, 10-11 and 11-12 year old levels. The coaches understand that the goal is to put the best players on the team. If a coach is not able to be there, he is asked to send an assistant coach, or at least provide us with written or verbal recommendations for consideration. If there is a tie in the voting for the 6th roster spot, then all of the players involved in the tie will be placed on the team (up to 3).

After the first 6 players are elected to the team, the head coach for the particular LLWS team is required to select players to fill out his roster. This is done over the following week or two, and the criteria considered by a particular coach are up to him or her. In addition, the exact number of players that a head coach adds to his or her roster is also at his discretion. There are significant reasons for keeping the number of players down, as every player on the roster has to play a certain number of outs and must bat at least once. The presence of a lesser skilled player on a team's roster can become a significant liability, and the substitution rules are brutal. The goal of each coach is to put the best team on the field that they can to represent Dubuque Little League.

At the 9-10 year old level, it should also be remembered that the 10 year olds playing up in the Majors are also eligible for the team, and the 9-10 year old coaches will give those kids (that parents of kids playing in the minors never see) a lot of consideration. They have spent a year facing faster pitching and playing a more competitive level of ball. This does give them an advantage. Many of the teams we face in 9-10 year old LLWS play are almost entirely made up of 10 year olds that are playing in the 11-12 year old division (majors) during the regular season. The more players we have of that caliber, the better our teams tend to be. This does not mean that all kids that are 10 years old and playing in the majors will automatically make a 9-10 year old LLWS team.

The 10-11 year old team: The selection of this team is a little different. This team is the last team to be voted on by the coaches, after the 9-10 and 11-12 year old teams. It is possible for a player to be nominated and elected to two different teams. It will then be up to that player to decide which team he/she wishes to play on - he/she can only play on one team. If a player is elected to two teams (for example a 10 year old elected to both the 9-10 year old team and the 10-11 year old team), he will have 4 days to choose which team that he wants to play on. The team that he did not choose will need to fill that spot... and it will be filled by the head coach (he will select a substitute player). Some people may not agree with this process, and we can appreciate why... but it must be completed very quickly in order to put the teams together and allow them to start practicing together.

Players who chose not to play: Players do not have to play on a LLWS team just because they are elected to the team. If a player is elected to the team, but chooses not to play, then the head coach for that LLWS team will be allowed to select a player to fill that roster spot.

Selection of Coaches: Coaches are selected based upon the team standings at each level on June 1 of each year. For example, the majors head coach from the North with the highest standing is given first opportunity to coach the North team. If he either is unwilling or unable to coach the team, it is then offered to the majors head coach from the North with the second highest standing. It should be noted that the League President is not eligible to coach a LLWS team, so he or she is skipped in this process. It is only to be expected that a coach that accepts the position, which involves a significant time commitment and a lot of work, is going to select his/her own child(ren) to play on his/her LLWS team. The head coach has the right to select his/her assistant coach, and it is reasonably expected that the assistant coach's child(ren) will also be selected by the head coach to play on the team.

Juniors Team: Due to the lower number of kids that play at the Junior level (we are up from prior years), only one LLWS team is fielded at the Juniors level. This is authorized and approved by Little League International. The process for selecting the coaches and the team are the same at the Junior level, but the pool from which the team and coaches are selected is made up of the entire Junior league (regardless of charter). Players considering participating in the Juniors LLWS team also need to remember that we are the only Juniors team in District 2, which means that we automatically advance to the State level of competition. This competition has traditionally been held at one of the larger metropolitan areas in Iowa. Last year it was in Des Moines, and 2 years ago it was in Sioux City. This can involve some additional expense for players and families that will need to travel and arrange accommodations for several days several hours travel away.

Conclusion: It is important to remember that players are selected to play on the team based upon their respective skills. For example, when considering a player, most coaches will consider how that player bats against the best pitchers in the league, not how they bat against the average pitcher in the league. They are unlikely to see any “average” pitchers at this level of play; they are only going to see pitching equivalent to our best pitching, and possibly even better than that. The same comparison is to be expected with regards to fielding and pitching skills. It needs to be understood that at this level of play, we are looking for the absolute best players we can place on the team. If a team is to be successful, there is very little margin for error, and a lesser skilled player can find competition at this level to be very frustrating. For this reason, a LLWS head coach is allowed to fill out his roster (after the league coaches have elected the first 6 players) based upon any criteria that he believes are appropriate. The goal is to put the best team on the field that a coach can to represent Dubuque Little League, and every coach wants his team to win at this very competitive level of play.

The schedule of LLWS games in Dubuque will be posted on the website as soon as it is disclosed by District Administration. I would invite all parents and players to come out and watch as our teams represent our league in the Little League World Series. I believe most people will better understand what I am talking about after they see the level of competition that takes place in the LLWS. It is not significantly different from what you see on TV each year when the LLWS is televised at the regional level and above.