



Tips for Operating a Challenger Division

Challenger Program FAQ



- **What is the Little League Challenger Program?**
- The Little League Challenger Program is Little League's adaptive baseball program for individuals with physical and intellectual challenges.

- **Who can participate in the Little League Challenger Program?**
- Any individual with a physical or intellectual challenge may participate. If an individual can participate in the traditional Little League Baseball or Softball program with reasonable accommodations they should do so. The Little League Challenger Division accommodates players ages 4-18, or up to age 22 if still enrolled in school. The Senior League Challenger Division accommodates players ages 15 and above (no maximum age).

Challenger Program FAQ



- **Is there a cost to participate in the Challenger Program?**
 - Each local Challenger Program sets its own policy with respect to registration fees. No player may be denied the opportunity to participate based on the inability to pay a registration fee.

- **What rules are followed during a Challenger game?**
 - Flexibility and adaptability are key during Challenger games. Little League provides all chartered teams with a rulebook that includes a best practices guide to operating a Challenger Game. Typically games are 1-2 innings long and last about an hour. All players play defensively and bat every inning.

Challenger Program FAQ



- **What are “buddies” and what role do they have in the Challenger Division?**
 - Buddies are individuals who assist Challenger athletes in the areas of batting, base running and defense, but only as needed. Often buddies are peer athletes who are participating in the Little League Baseball or Softball program.

- **What type of field are Challenger Games played on?**
 - Challenger games may be played on a traditional or synthetic baseball or softball field. Little League encourages the use of traditional fields for the Challenger Program so that participants can enjoy playing on the same fields as other Little Leaguers in the community.

- **How many Challenger Programs are currently operating?**
 - There are currently over 950 Challenger programs in 10 countries around the world. Over 30,000 athletes participate in the Challenger Division every year.



Starting a Challenger Division

Elect a VP of the Challenger Division



- Electing a Vice President to oversee Challenger Division Operations is an important task for any league operating a Challenger Division. One of the primary goals of the Challenger Division is to give boys and girls with mental and physical challenges an opportunity to participate in the local Little League program. The Vice President of the Challenger Division acts as a liaison between the league board and those involved in the Challenger Division and should ensure that Challenger participants are included in all league activities.
- Responsibilities of the Vice President of the Challenger Division include:
 - Ensuring that fields are scheduled for games
 - Recommending managers and coaches for Challenger teams to the board for approval
 - Working with Little League teams to recruit buddies for Challenger games
 - Coordinating Challenger player recruitment efforts
- Providing the local Little League Board with an update on Challenger activities at each board meeting

Visit with the Special Education Department of your Local School District



- Contacting your local Special Education Department is a great first step to recruiting new players for the Challenger Division. Many departments will be willing to let you briefly present the ins and outs of the Challenger Division to the special education instructors in the district. The Challenger Division can be described as “adaptive baseball” for children with special needs. It can also be emphasized that the Challenger Division gives every child the opportunity to participate in baseball regardless of ability or limitations. It is important for the school district officials to understand the purpose and nature of the Challenger Division before asking them to promote the program.
- Once you have had the opportunity to meet with school officials, ask them if they would be willing to send home information about your Challenger Division, as well as information about sign-ups in newsletters that are sent home to parents. This will provide the league with an effective and inexpensive way to reach your target audience.

Advertise in the Community



- Community advertising is another effective way to spread the word about your Challenger Division. Challenger Division flyers are available to be downloaded online. These posters can be customized to contain your league's contact information as well as registration dates and locations. Most community businesses such as grocery stores, community centers, post offices, doctor's offices, etc. will allow you to hang the flyers at no cost.
- Additionally, you may want to consider reaching out to your local media, especially if you are getting ready to offer the Challenger Division for the first time. Many newspapers, radio stations, and even local TV media will be interested in picking up a story about your league's new offering and the positive impact that the Challenger Division can have on the community. You can reach out to the local media through a press release, or even a phone call.

Hold a Successful Registration Day



- Registration for the Challenger Division should be incorporated into your league's normal registration days and should be held at the same location. This increases visibility for the Challenger Division within the community. Posters may also be hung during registration to make sure that everyone knows that the league is now offering the Challenger Division. Posters are available to be downloaded online.
- One item to keep in mind on registration day is that creating a special registration form for the Challenger Division will save the league time and make the program easier to administer. The registration form for the Challenger Division should include a place for the player to register as well as list any necessary special accommodations. This will help the league to best balance Challenger teams based on ability. The registration form can also include a place for the player to list if they will need a buddy and, if so, who they would prefer to have for a buddy or if they would prefer to have the league select a buddy for them.



Hold a Parent Meeting

- When a parent enrolls their son or daughter in the Challenger Division for the first time, it is often the first organized athletic activity in which their child will be participating. As with any parent allowing a child to participate in a new activity, there is often some level of apprehension and uncertainty about what to expect the first time their child steps onto the field.
- Holding a parents meeting allows parents of new participants to ask questions of parents whose children have participated in the Challenger Division previously. This can help to ease any concern a parent has about their child's participation in the program and to give the parent a comfort level with the local Challenger Division. Holding a parents meeting may also convince a parent who may not have otherwise allowed their child to participate in the Challenger Division, to allow them to participate.

Teach Baseball Skills



- The fundamental goal of the Little League Challenger Division is to provide an environment where participants can learn and enjoy the game of baseball in an environment structured to their abilities. Buddies are used to assist players in the areas of batting, fielding and base running when necessary. In addition to assisting players, buddies should also help teach players baseball skills and fundamentals.
- The baseball skills and abilities of players on a typical Challenger team may vary greatly. The coach of each team should work with the players and buddies to set individual goals for each player. For some players, a goal may be learning how to throw a baseball, while for others a goal may be learning to field a ground ball, catch a fly ball or swing the bat without the assistance of a buddy. Some players may even work towards improving their abilities so that they do not need regular assistance from a buddy. In these cases, one buddy may be able to “float” between several players on the field and provide assistance when needed.
- As players improve their baseball skills, they enjoy a sense of accomplishment as they achieve their goals. It is important to remember that the role of the buddy is to assist when necessary and to help the participants learn the game, not to play the game for the participants.