

## **Straight Scoop about All Stars**

As the season begins to wind down, players', parents' and fans' thoughts begin to turn towards the second season of Little League (LL), All Stars (AS). Chandler National Little League (CNLL), by direction of the Board of Directors, participates in the three available levels of All Stars; ages 9-10, 10-11, and 11-12 [Majors] both North and South, one team for Juniors, and this season, we will have both a 9-10 and Majors Softball AS team. In an effort to help those new to CNLL or to All Stars, the following will provide information of All Stars as it pertains to CNLL.

The 9-10 and 10-11 divisions play in District tournaments with the winner advancing to the Arizona State Little League Tournament. Majors and Juniors have the same opportunities with State winners moving on to Regional play. The Regional winners then advance and play in the LL World Series: the ultimate prize!

All Stars, although a prominent component of Little League, is, in reality, a small fraction of the responsibility of a local league and consists of a small number of kids. Little League has offered youth baseball for over 60 years. The founding principal of Little League is to provide an opportunity for every youth a place to play the greatest American pastime: baseball. In league terms, every child shall be included when drafting or placing children on a team. This spring, CNLL is proud that more than 950 children were given the opportunity to learn and play the game of baseball and softball.

All Stars, by definition, cannot include all children of the league. Up to 14 players can be on a roster. Doing the math, with the availability of up to 14 roster spots, up to 84 children, ages 9-12, have an opportunity to participate on AS teams. For 2009, the elected CNLL All Star Managers have 432 players which to form the three AS teams. Less than 19% of the players may be chosen. All Star Managers have the daunting task of choosing players for which they feel have the best opportunity to win in a tournament setting. Make no assumptions, AS is about winning the next game and moving on in tournament play. However, it is not about "win at all costs". LL mandates are still followed with mandatory playing time, sportsmanship, courage, respect and overall character building of children being emphasized throughout all tournament play.

The huge question is always: "How are players chosen?" CNLL chooses to utilize a tryout system as a small part of the overall evaluation. AS Managers, coaches and evaluators are present during the tryouts and help provide the manager with information to help choose the players. Ultimately, as with a regular season team, the responsibility lies with the AS Manager. They look for players available to put together a team that they feel will best represent the league and most importantly, have the best opportunity to win. Many have speculated that teams are already chosen by the AS manager (or the Board) prior to the tryouts. While absolutely not true, there are logical explanations as to why managers already have players in mind. With the large number of players in the league and from those that **opt** to participate; it would be nearly impossible, and certainly not as effective, for AS managers to choose the players based on a two or three hour tryout if they did not already know the history of players in the league. This is especially true at the pitcher and catcher positions, as these positions are not evaluated at the tryout. The AS Managers begin to frequent more regular season games throughout the latter

portion of the season and during the CNLL League Championship to begin the process of evaluation. Please note that AS Managers are strictly prohibited from interfering with ongoing games and current teams. Game evaluations are to review children in their most comfortable setting where they have competed all year. Most discussions occur off field and via electronic messaging by current team managers, AS Managers and sometimes, the parents.

Regular season managers are the best source of information for AS managers and are strongly encouraged to participate in the AS selection process by providing information regarding the regular season statistics, and overall performance of the players they feel are appropriate for AS teams. At a minimum, regular season managers are required to provide team scorebooks to the AS Managers at the end of the season. With the multitude of information, the AS managers will have a good idea of the players they feel will have the best opportunity to succeed prior to tryouts. Realistically, the manager may only be looking for up to 4 or 5 players to complete the team. Again, the responsibility is with the AS Manager to choose a team for which he feels has the best opportunity to succeed.

As stated above, All Star teams are divided by age. The purpose of LL International combining ages for AS teams (9-10, 10-11, 11-12) is to allow for smaller, less populated leagues that do not have the numbers such as CNLL, the ability to fill a complete roster. For example, leagues may not have the number of 11 year olds to fill a complete roster for the 10-11 year olds without choosing children who are age 10.

11 year old Majors players will see and experience a higher quality of pitching and overall play than 11 year old players in the AAA division. Logically, if a manager's goal is to choose the best players available, the manager will look to the Majors Division to pick a large majority, if not all, of the players for both the 11-12 and 10-11 AS teams.

This is also true for the 9-10 AS team. 10 year olds make up the largest population of children in the kid pitch divisions and the more skilled players are drafted to play in the AAA division in the pre-regular season draft. Following the logic above, the 9-10 AS manager will primarily, if not exclusively, look to the AAA division to pick the players that have succeeded at a higher level of play.

With that said, the player's ability is not the sole characteristic for managers to review. The manager must choose players to fill a roster, but they must also form a team. The selections have to be based on a combination of skills and team chemistry to allow CNLL to field the best team possible. For example, there may be 4 or 5 kids that excel only at the catcher position. Logically, an overall team roster cannot have 5 players that excel at just one position. Managers must also review overall athleticism, versatility, and attitudes of the players. It is the responsibility of the manager to bring the children together and build a cohesive team so they can succeed. CNLL, as noted on the banners at the fields, has enjoyed many successful years in AS tournament play. Therefore, AS Managers shoulder a great deal of responsibility as they represent all of CNLL in AS tournament play.

All Star Managers are approved volunteers of the league and they must commit their time and efforts for up to 3 additional months during the summer. Per LL, local league AS tryouts, team

notifications or practices may not take place until June 15 (Minor league AS teams have some exceptions). The District tournament begins just two short weeks after the announcements. Managers and their families, as well as those of the players, must be willing to commit to the sacrifices they will endure because of the financial and time commitment with All Stars. Practices usually begin the day after the teams are announced and will most likely continue every day until tournament play begins. Tournaments may span a two-week period with teams playing an average of 5 or 6 games with many games on back-to-back nights. Practices will also continue throughout the tournament between games.

If the team is successful in District play, they move on to State Tournaments where, in addition to the time commitment, travel may also become necessary. Obviously, Majors and JR teams will have more extensive travel as they progress through AS Tournaments. One can see that although a great experience for our children, SIGNIFICANT time commitments and family sacrifices are the norm for AS teams.

“Straight Scoop” is provided to help educate anyone with questions and dispel the many rumors surrounding All Stars. While other leagues may opt to organize and run AS teams in a different manner, CNLL is proud of the success we have had with our AS formats and will continue to strive and look for ways to improve the overall process that will enhance our children’s abilities to succeed.

Sincerely,

**Brett Watson**  
CNLL President