



## RATIONALE AND FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**Background and Context:** In 2018, WBAC celebrates its 60th anniversary, and we have always taken great pride in providing a high quality youth baseball program in our community. Although we are a recreation league first and foremost, our league has been historically affiliated with PONY baseball for the main purpose of post season tournament play. This fall, PONY followed Little League and changed the age cutoff date from Apr 30th to Aug 31st. Little League (the largest youth league in the nation) announced this change early in 2017. The rationale behind this change was to make the Little League Baseball Division truly a 12 and under program, and bring its registration in line with most school districts, allowing more kids to play with their classmates. As an aside, Little League also plays on significantly smaller fields (46' mound, 60' bases). The smaller fields and the fact that many players turn 13 during their highly televised tournament, contributed to Little League's decision as much as anything. PONY, despite playing on larger fields (50' mound, 70' bases), followed Little League's decision. However, nearly all travel and club affiliations across the United States (and Cooperstown) have remained with the April 30th cutoff. This age cutoff change will affect roughly 33% of our players. Given the potential impact of this change, the board and committee explored multiple options to ensure the best outcomes for our players.

### Is Babe Ruth and Cal Ripken separate organizations?

- Babe Ruth League, Inc. is the parent organization, while Cal Ripken is a division (4-12 year olds) under Babe Ruth League. Babe Ruth is also a division within Babe Ruth League (for our 13-15, and 16-18 year olds). This FAQ refers to both Babe Ruth and Cal Ripken, but they are all under the Babe Ruth League, Inc.

### Why we are switching affiliation from PONY to Babe Ruth/Cal Ripken?

- The biggest driver in our decision was to ***preserve the current age cutoff and not force 33% of our players to miss a year of their playing eligibility.*** Most of our recreational players will not play in high school, and many stop playing after their 12 year old year. We felt having to skip a year of youth baseball was unfair, and not congruent with our league values.
- We also recognized the potential impact the age change would have on our elite/select teams' participation in our league. All travel affiliations, as well as Cooperstown, are maintaining the Apr 30<sup>th</sup> cutoff (to restate, they are NOT changing). If we remained with PONY, some of these players would be split across divisions with their teammates. This would make it more difficult to maintain these teams, and several would opt for travel only and leave recreational play. We believe our league is differentiated by retaining the full spectrum of talent in our recreation league, as it promotes a broader sense of community/support and yields a higher quality baseball experience.
- Another consideration is the atrophy in participation in PONY baseball. There are only 3 remaining PONY sections in the state of Virginia. Of those, only 3 or 4 leagues routinely participate in post season play (beyond the Pinto divisions). The opportunities that

PONY provides continues to shrink, while the inconsistency across PONY organizations and the associated costs (tournament fees, travel, vacation time, gate fees) for tournament teams continues to rise. Cal Ripken provides greater consistency, and significantly more participation across the state. Additionally, the new affiliation provides opportunities for growth at WBAC. As PONY participation has decreased, we also have restrictive eligibility boundaries with other PONY leagues in close proximity to our area. This is also compounded by the slower population growth in our normal WB geography. The new affiliation allows us to expand our boundary, and maintain/increase a healthy number of teams in each division across our league.

### **Will my child play in a different division with the change to Babe Ruth/Cal Ripken?**

- Since we are maintaining the current age cutoff, your child will continue to play with the group he has played with in the past, and he will not have to “skip” a year if he has a May 1 – Aug 31 birthday. If he is on a current select/elite team, he will be able to continue playing in the same recreation division as his teammates. However, given the affiliation change, the divisions in Babe Ruth/Cal Ripken have different names, but will follow the age groups we have had in the past (except for Pony and Colt). The basic divisions are:
- 4-5 year olds: T-Ball
- 6 year olds: T-Ball/Modified Coach Pitch
- 7-8 year olds: Rookie
- 9-10 year olds: Minor
- 11-12 year olds: Major/70
- 13-15 year olds: Babe Ruth 13-15
- 16-18 year olds: Babe Ruth 16-18

### **How will the affiliation with Babe Ruth affect the style of baseball we play at WBAC?**

- There is little change to the type of baseball your child will be playing in recreation (basic rules, field dimensions, etc). A few differences are noted below:
  - Our coach pitch league (7-8 year olds), we will continue to have coaches pitch in recreation games, however, the official All Star tournament is machine pitch.
  - For our 9/10 year old division, the tournament rules are closed bases (no lead offs). For our rec season, we will continue to play open bases.
  - For our 13-15 division, we will no longer be playing 54’/80’ bases as they do in PONY. We will be playing 60/90 in recreation and tournament games, just as they do in JJV and JV baseball.

### **Do I need a new bat to comply with Babe Ruth/Cal Ripken rules?**

- Both Babe Ruth and PONY are switching to the USA bat standards for 2018, **so you will need a bat with a USA stamp** to play in our recreation league.
  - Cal Ripken Division (7-12 year olds) - All non-wood bats must have the USABat Marking. The Barrel Maximum is  $2\frac{5}{8}$ ". No BBCOR Bats are permitted in the Cal Ripken Division.
  - Babe Ruth Baseball 13-15 Division – All non-wood bats must have the USABat Marking or marked BBCOR .50. Bat Barrel -  $2\frac{5}{8}$ ".

- Babe Ruth Baseball 16-18 Division - All non-wood bats MUST be a BBCOR .50 and no greater than a -3. Barrel - 2 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub>".

**Will the change to Babe Ruth/Cal Ripken cost more?**

- The affiliation costs and tournament team registrations are comparable with PONY, and in some aspects more affordable. We expect no major impact to our league operational costs, and **our registration fees will not be significantly affected by this change.**

**What does this change mean for our All Star program? Will we still have All-Stars?**

- We will still have an all-star program, as well as an Elite/Select program as we do today, but we will no longer be playing the usual PONY teams at the usual locations during official tournament season. Given the new affiliation, the all-star opportunities, and tournament trail are different, and offer exciting, and more competitive opportunities for our players. We still plan to enter the same number of teams (based on player/coach availability) as we have with PONY. The one exception is our 7U All Star team. Cal Ripken does not have a 7U division. We intend to form a 7U All Star team and provide them 1-2 competitive tournaments to participate in at the close of the season. We will work with the baseball committee to evaluate options for this group. Further information about the All Star tournament trail can be found on the Babe Ruth Southeast Region website: [http://brlseregion.com/main\\_page.php](http://brlseregion.com/main_page.php)  
The table below provides an illustrative example of the 10U age group tournament trail, locations, and participants.

**How is our eligibility boundary affected by the change to Babe Ruth/Cal Ripken?**

We are expanding the historical boundary we have had under PONY, so if your child was eligible for All-Star play before, he will be eligible to play All Stars in Babe Ruth/Cal Ripken. Given there is only 1 other chartered league on the south side of the peninsula, our boundary now includes Suffolk and areas of Norfolk. If you live in an area that is not specified in either WBAC, Denbigh, or Deep Creek’s boundary (gray area), you will have a choice of leagues. Please contact your player agent during registrations to learn more and confirm your eligibility.

**Example 10U All Star Tournament Trail**



District 1	VA State Championship	Southeast Region	World Series
<b>Location: Gloucester VA</b> Denbigh New Kent Deep Creek Gloucester (Western Branch)	<b>Location: Rockville VA</b> Williamsburg Rockville Stafford New Kent Winchester Northside South Augusta Arlington Glen Allen	<b>Location: Nashville TN</b> Georgia Tennessee East North Carolina Virginia Florida South Tennessee (Host) South Carolina Tennessee West Florida North	<b>Location: Hammond IN</b> Indiana (Host) Colorado Connecticut Alabama New Jersey Hawaii North Carolina Indiana

**Has anything changed for managers and coaches?**

- Yes. Babe Ruth/Cal Ripken requires a one-time certification through their coaching program. This online training covers basic coaching philosophy, safety, working with youth, and a few fundamentals/rules. The training takes about 2 hours to complete. All coaches must have this certification to coach in 2018. The league is evaluating how to implement prior to the spring and will have information available during registrations.

In summary, while this change to a new national affiliation has little effect on our recreational league, we recognize there are some modifications to our normal post season operations. We are excited about the new, and frankly better, opportunities that Babe Ruth/Cal Ripken offers, and we will continue to make adjustments over time, as we grow with Babe Ruth, to ensure our league continues to thrive and provides a quality youth baseball experience for our community.