

DLL TOURNAMENT TEAM SELECTION PROCESS

Each year, Dulles Little League enters teams into Little League sanctioned post-season tournaments. These are commonly referred to as "All-Star teams", which is a bit of a misnomer because these are not true All-Star teams in the sense that the teams are not necessarily composed of the 12 best players in each league. Rather, the teams are composed of the 12 players the league's managers believe give DLL the best chance of *winning a competitive tournament*. As valuable as ace pitchers and slugging power hitters are to a team, you wouldn't be very successful if you had 12 ace pitchers who couldn't hit or 12 power hitters who can't play defense! A player who is a very average hitter but can run like the wind and steal a ton of bases can add a lot of value in tournament play, as can the slick fielding shortstop who won't hit any home runs but can get on base. And yes, you do also need the sluggers and the aces. The key is finding the right balance, the right chemistry, and the right attitude.

DLL has had a lot of success in recent years by following this model, and that success has been a great source of pride for all connected with DLL. These are competitive tournaments that our teams enter with the goal of winning, but win or lose the hard work and dedication put in by the players selected for these teams foster the qualities of sportsmanship, teamwork, and camaraderie – building character and forging friendships that will last a lifetime.

Still, because it is commonly understood we will use the term "All-Star" throughout this document as a matter of convenience, and for lack of a better term. Just bear in mind that the goal is to form a winning team, not to simply recognize the best players.

Also, throughout the document the terms "he" and "his" are used because with all the advancements of Western culture there is still no English word that means "he or she". Tournament play is not by any means limited to male players.

The Teams

There are four levels of post-season play. Dulles Little League has two charters – National and American – each of which enters a team in each level Majors and below. There is one Juniors team due to lower registration numbers at that level. We hope to also field a Seniors team, perhaps in concert with one or more Seniors teams within District 16. If you do not know which charter your child belongs to, check the Standings page of the DLL website.

In the past, each tournament at the District level was a "pool play" or "round robin" format – each team played each of the other teams which guaranteed each team would play at least five games. That is no longer the case. With the addition of Loudoun South, there are now seven teams in our district and that has led to a double-elimination format at some, if not all, levels. That means that each team is now guaranteed only two games; lose twice and you are done. All tournaments beyond the District level are double-elimination.

The levels of play are as follows:

Juniors and Seniors Team

Eligible players include all players of League Age 13 and 14 who played in the Juniors or Seniors division this season. Tournament play begins with a District tournament, and the winner of that tournament advances to the VA State Tournament. Reference the All-Stars web page on the DLL website for the dates and location of the District and State Tournaments.

Majors Team (also known as the 11/12 team)

Eligible players include all players of League Age 11 and 12 who played at the Majors level this season. The vast majority of players selected to these teams will be of League Age 12. No League Age 10's are eligible even if they were in the Majors division, per Little League rules. Teams formed at this level compete with the goal of eventually making their way to Williamsport, ESPN, and the Little League World Series! But there are many obstacles to overcome to get that far.

The first hurdle is the District 16 tournament, which is played locally and features both DLL teams, two teams from Central Loudoun (Leesburg), two teams from Upper Loudoun (Purcellville), and a team from Loudoun South (South Riding). Reference the All-Stars web page on the DLL website for the dates and location of the District and State Tournaments.

The winner of the VA State Tournament advances to the Southeast Regional tournament, and the winner of the Southeast Regional Tournament advances to Williamsport, PA for the Little League World Series.

10/11 Team

Eligible players include all players of League Age 10 and 11. The vast majority of the players selected to these teams will be of League Age 11. While AAA players are technically eligible, the team competes at the Majors level so the team is composed first and foremost of Majors players. In recent years we have supplemented the team with one or two of the top performing League Age 11's from AAA to round out the roster, but these are exceptions to the general rule. First preference is to fill the roster with qualified League Age 10's and 11's from the Majors division. So while it is possible for League Age 11 at AAA to be named to the 10/11 team, it is unlikely. We mention this only to set expectations.

The 10/11 team competes against the same District 16 opponents (Central Loudoun, Upper Loudoun, Loudoun South), with the winner advancing to the VA State Tournament. Reference the All-Stars web page on the DLL website for the dates and location of the District and State Tournaments.

9/10 Team

Eligible players include all players of League Age 9 and 10 who played at the AAA level or above. AA players are not considered. This team competes at the AAA level, though most League Age 10's who played DLL Majors and were not selected for the 10/11 team are usually (but not automatically) added to the 9/10 team.

This team competes against the same District 16 opponents (Central Loudoun, Upper Loudoun, Loudoun South), with the winner advancing to the VA State Tournament and the state winner advancing to the regional tournament. Reference the All-Stars web page on the DLL website for the dates and location of the District and State Tournaments.

The Rules

Tournament rules are very different from Little League "house" rules. The biggest adjustment for most players is in the playing time. Obviously, anyone selected to one of the tournament teams is recognized as a talented player and a valuable member of the team. Most of them will have spent little or no time on the bench during the DLL season. At this level, everyone is a star player. They are competing against each other for playing time and positioning. Many of them have never had to fight for a job before. In tournament play, each player is guaranteed only one turn at bat and one defensive inning each game.

Other rules of note:

- There is no running batting order during tournament play, even at the 9/10 level. Majors and Juniors players are already used to the 9-man batting order, but this is a new concept to AAA players.
- The rules regarding pitchers' days of rest are very different.
- There is free substitution (once the substitute has met his minimum playing time requirements), but once a player has established a spot in the batting order, he cannot move to a different spot in the order except in case of injury. Example: Player A is the lead-off batter for the visiting team. He bats in the top of the 1st, but Player B substitutes for him defensively in the bottom of the 1st. Player B must remain in the game until he has been up to bat at least once. Player A, at some point after that, *must* re-enter the game in place of Player B and play at least one inning defensively. Once he has done that, Player A and Player B can be substituted for each other at any time but only in the lead-off spot in the batting order.
- One time each inning, the manager may use a player from his bench (a player not currently in the line-up) to run for a player who is on base. This is known as a "7-14 runner", as it is allowed by rule #7.14 in the Little League rule book. It is not the same as pinch running, as a pinch runner becomes a permanent occupant of that position in the batting order while a 7-14 runner does not constitute the removal from the line-up of the player for whom he is running. In other words, the 7-14 runner does not assume that player's place in the line-up. This is where a running specialist becomes a very valuable offensive weapon. The same player may be used as a 7-14 runner every inning he is not in the line-up, and a team may use as many different 7-14 runners as they like as long as they only use one per inning and as long as a different player is run for each time (the same player can't be run for twice in the same game under rule 7.14, though he can be pinch run for as many times as he is on base). Confused? So become many managers under the pressure of a close game. Strategy becomes very important at this level of play.
- The "10 run rule" is in effect. If a team is losing by 10 runs or more after the 4th inning or later (or after 3 and a half innings if the home team is ahead), the game is over.

The Time Commitment

Be aware that there *is* a rather large time commitment involved, and if the team advances beyond the local District tournament there is also a considerable travel and hotel expense associated with the state tournament and beyond. By making himself eligible for selection, the player (and parents) pledge their commitment and consent to the time and expense involved. If selected, the player is sacrificing much of his summer to compete with the DLL All-Star team for which he was chosen.

The time commitment begins shortly after the DLL World Series games (2nd week of June), with the teams practicing five or six days per week until the start of the District tournament (early July in most cases). Players are expected to attend all practices and games unless reasonably excused (e.g. emergencies), and are expected to remain with the team at least through the state tournament should they advance that far. Plan on committing to at least the end of July. A Majors team that goes "all the way" will have been playing ball from mid-June through late August. Players who are unable to pledge their commitment through the end of July due to family vacations, etc., cannot be considered for selection to a team.

While tournament rules state that each player must be used in every game, the amount of time guaranteed each player is minimal: one turn at bat, and one inning in the field. Some players might be selected as specialists – for example, a pinch running specialist, or a defensive specialist – and might play the minimal one inning and one at bat each game along with substitute runner assignments. If this is the case, the managers have been instructed to make it clear to the player that he will be serving in a very specialized role so that his playing time (or lack thereof) can be considered when making the decision to accept the roster spot and make the time commitment. But once you have made the commitment, whether the player's role was clear or not you are expected to honor the commitment or risk forfeiting future consideration to tournament play.

The Process

Under Little League rules, the DLL Board of Directors (BoD) has the authority to form our tournament teams in any manner we choose as long as all players meet the eligibility rules and are placed on teams within their appropriate charter (National or American). Besides age restrictions, eligibility rules include address verification (players must present proof of residence within league boundaries - and the paperwork is more intensive than that of obtaining a U.S. passport!) and must have played in at least 60% of their DLL team's spring games.

The BoD has implemented a process which allows each manager within his division's charter to have equal say in the composition of most of the team, involves the players themselves, and gives the All-Star managers final say in the completion of their roster.

The process and approximate timing of each phase are detailed below.

Player commitment – mid/late-May

All eligible players in Majors and AAA are asked to complete a player commitment affidavit and, if interested in post-season play, to pledge their commitment to the team if selected. Players who are eligible for more than one team have the option of committing to one or both. Example: A League Age 10 playing in Majors is eligible for both the 10/11 team and the 9/10 team. On the commitment form, he has four options. He may:

- a) Make himself eligible for the 10/11 team only, and opt not to make himself eligible for the 9/10 team if he is not selected for the 10/11.
- b) Make himself eligible for the 9/10 team only, and not make himself eligible for the 10/11 team. A player might do this if he would rather be a primary contributor to the 9/10 team than play a limited role on the 10/11 team.
- c) Make himself eligible for both teams. In this instance, the 10/11 team would form their roster, and if the player is selected he is then ineligible for the 9/10 team (you cannot be named to more than one team). If the player is not selected to the 10/11 team, he then becomes eligible for selection to the 9/10 team.
- d) Decide not to be considered for either team. Nobody is forced to make a time commitment to play for any of our post-season teams.

In the past, this part of the process was not conducted until later in the season. Several years ago, the BoD made a controversial decision to not form a 10/11 team in one of the charters due to unusually low player commitment in the initial (informal) polling of the parents, a decision that was reached *based on*

the best information available to us at the time. We are beginning the formal commitment process earlier this year so that we have the best possible information available to us to avoid and resolve any unforeseen issues in roster fulfillment. We are committed to forming teams in both charters at all levels (one team at Juniors as there is only one charter at that level), as we do not foresee the same issues we faced that one spring.

The player commitment affidavits will be completed electronically via the DLL website and collected by the DLL BoD.

Manager selection – late May or early June

All eligible manager candidates are invited to nominate themselves for consideration to manage the appropriate team in their charter. Eligible managers include all Majors and AAA managers of spring DLL teams. Named assistants (the "official" assistant coach of each Majors and AAA team) are also eligible, though assistant coaches are rarely named to manage post-season teams. All managers of the charter vote among the candidates in their division. For example, all Majors National managers will vote for one of the DLL National Majors (11/12) team candidates and one of the DLL National 10/11 candidates. All AAA National managers will vote for one of the DLL National 9/10 candidates. Ditto for the American League at each level. The manager receiving the highest vote total, upon BoD approval, becomes the manager of that particular All-Star team, with the BoD breaking any ties with a vote of its own. If there are no Majors candidates for a given 10/11 team, AAA managers from the same charter are given consideration.

Player selections – early June

Once managers have been selected for each team, player eligibility and commitment have been established, and the players have been polled for nominations, all managers within a particular charter and division (Juniors, Majors National, Majors American, AAA National, AAA American) meet separately to form the rosters of each team. Juniors managers meet to form the Juniors team, Majors managers will meet to form the Majors and 10/11 teams within their charter, and the AAA managers will meet to form the 9/10 team within their charter. A member of the DLL BoD, usually the Player Agent, moderates each meeting.

The first 10 players are selected by a majority vote by the managers (all managers within the charter, not just the All-Star manager). The most common method of doing this is to agree on which players are unanimous (typically 5 or 6 players), and add them immediately to the list. This is followed by discussion and debate in which each manager is given the opportunity to present a case for the player(s) he believes should be included in the first 10. The All-Star manager is given the opportunity to express his desire for certain "types" of players based on what he has in the first set of players added to the roster; if he has a lot of solid pitching but no catchers and no middle infielders, he'll be asking for those; if he has a slew of powerful hitters but is thin on pitching, he'll be begging for pitchers.

After each manager has been afforded the chance to make a case for his players and there has been sufficient discussion, it is put to a vote. The top vote getters are added to the roster until there are 10 players on the roster.

The All-Star manager makes the final decision on which players complete the roster. It is usual and customary to carry 12 or 13 players, so the manager typically selects the last two or three. There are advantages to carrying 13 players (an extra coach is added to the dugout) and disadvantages (one more player to "keep happy" with his playing time and to get that 13th player in the line-up) so this comes down to the manager's preference. The manager will usually listen to further discussion and solicit advice on

the last few spots, and may go so far as to allow the other managers to vote on them, but he is not required to do either. Ideally, each DLL team would have at least one All-Star representative, but this is also not a requirement.

In forming the team, the managers consider not only skill level but the players that are most likely to give them the best chance of winning a tournament. The All-Star manager can steer the other managers toward certain players and away from others, though 10 of the roster spots ultimately come down to majority rule. They will consider whether they have each position covered, whether they have a good balance of offense, defense, and pitching, whether they can afford to hide a great hitter / subpar fielder in the outfield for an inning each game, whether they believe a given player will be content with the role they have in mind for him, and any other factor that will help build a winning team. And, of course, there is a very strong probability that the All-Star manager's own son will be selected to the team, either by vote or by the manager himself. It is the sole perk for the amount of time he is sacrificing to manage the team.

Official announcements – Early/Mid June

Previously, under Little League rules, the rosters could not be announced until June 15. The roster announcement dates have been modified starting, and those dates are listed on the DLL website under All-Stars. Anything heard before those dates is rumor and speculation. There will be a mandatory parents meeting in mid-June to cover paperwork requirements, code of conduct, expectations, and other topics beyond the material covered here.

In the end, the team does not always comprise the "best" players. There will be solid players who are disappointed in not being selected, and there will be role players who are thrilled to be named to the team in any capacity. The managers face some very difficult decisions, especially in narrowing down the final candidates for the last few roster spots. Whether your child is selected or not, please support the managers' decisions and encourage your child to be happy for those who were selected and come out to the games to cheer the team on to victory.