



Special Needs Children in the Recreational Baseball/Softball Program

It is the philosophy of Wheatland Athletic Association to progressively develop children's skills by offering programs for various age levels. As they develop, the children are taught the value of good sportsmanship and teamwork. Our intent is for children to have FUN and to enjoy the sport they play while learning the character building lessons that come from participating in team sports.

WAA has children participating at all ability levels, including some children with special needs. Our goal is to create a fun, positive and safe environment for all of the children on the team as well as to teach that all people are not the same. For all grade levels, WAA asks that coaches institute a Buddy system for the teams with special needs children. This system was instituted in the 2009 baseball season for recreational players and worked well. Coaches and umpires should talk prior to the start of the game and agree that the "Buddy system" will be used for at least 3 innings of the game. Preferably the special needs child/children will play every other inning, and non-buddy play will occur the remaining innings of play.

WAA asks that one player be assigned to the same position as the child with special needs. The buddy should be rotated so that no one teammate has to be a buddy more than any other. The buddies should have a chance to play at least one half the game without a buddy. Please place the special needs child in the outfield or second base. The team with the special needs child will be allowed to have 10 players on the field. If the special needs child can throw and catch the ball, the Buddy should encourage him or her to do so. We do not want the Buddy to be making plays, they are there to encourage and help to keep the child focused on the game. When the special needs child is batting, the opposing team should go easy on them from a pitching standpoint. We do want to encourage the rules of the game be followed, so if the child is thrown out, he is to sit on the bench like the other kids. At the end of the game, we ask that the teams stay on the field and allow the special needs child to run the bases with encouragement from both teams. What we are trying to do is create a positive experience for the child.

If at any time the special needs child becomes difficult or poses a safety threat to him or herself or anyone on the team, they should not be allowed on the field. If needed, the special needs child's parent or guardian can be the Buddy. The best situation, however, is to have a teammate be the Buddy. Parents of special needs players are encouraged to assistant coach on their team in order to assist with the Buddy program as well as their child. Under certain circumstances, parents/guardians may be required to be present at practices and games.

On the waiver portion of the registration form, WAA asks for parents to note any limitations that their child may have and to communicate these limitations to the coach. This does not always happen so it is important that coaches evaluate and determine the child's level of disability and discuss any concerns with the family. Effective immediately, Wheatland Athletic Association will be adding the following sentence to the registration forms; "Under certain circumstances, parents/guardians may be required to be present and involved at practices and games".

Thank you, coaches and parents, for your continued commitment to youth sports. What we are trying to do is foster knowledge of the game, team work and create a positive experience for all participants. Please remember, this is a recreational league and we want it to be more about fun than about winning. The experiences of helping a teammate will last well beyond the memory of who won or lost. Parents of special needs children have told us that little things like what we are trying to do above make a world of difference to them and their children.

