

What is Travel Baseball?

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Travel Baseball is considered by its design as a higher level of competition, compared to what your traditional, recreational leagues provide. There are several factors which make these two situations very different from one another. Ideally, coaches would like for parents and players to have a clear understanding of their differences, prior to deciding which of these forums is best suited for them (as a family). As you read further, we will try to share some of the issues we encounter as players, parents or coaches; regarding the different elements that make up "recreational" and "competitive" sports...in this case, baseball. The views expressed here serve only as a tool of reference and not necessarily as the only point of view on all there is to know about "Travel Baseball".

At the beginning...

Most adults are familiar with the simpler days of the past, when everyone went to their local Little League and signed up their..."Little Johnny", for the upcoming season. A few days after registration, "Little Johnny", nervously awaits the first call from his coach, letting him know the name of the team that eventually selected him. "Little Johnny" was very happy in anticipation for his new uniform and what it would look like. Soon after he would go on to his first practice and finally meet his new teammates. Unbeknown to "Little Johnny", the entire process, (under a recreational environment), is designed to create equal participation and to eliminate as many chances for failure or disappointment as possible. In essence, Johnny is going to play regardless, since Mom or Dad has already paid his registration fee.

A New Choice...

Nowadays, a new opportunity exists which wasn't available, not so long ago! "Travel Baseball", has now become an attractive idea that has taken almost a "prestigious" entity! Just think...you so often now hear proud parents at the water cooler having discussions about their "Little Johnny", who is now a travel ball player...they proudly discuss it as if it's a private membership club!

Here's the catch, however...Within the "Travel Ball" environment, Johnny is no longer sheltered from the possibility of failure or lack of participation! One of the lessons parents learn when they're first exposed to this competitive baseball concept, is that there's a chance that their baby's ego may be crushed...How so?...he's never had to be evaluated against his own peers before, or even compete for something at such a young age...until now!

The Reality...

All of us as parents want what's best for our children. We don't ever want to see our children fail or experience disappointment! Baseball...as we all know, is supposed to be a fun sport!

When it comes to "Travel Baseball", here's the tough part...Now that we actually have a choice to make between selecting a recreational forum or opt for a competitive one,

many parents and players still choose to be drawn to the "prestige" of being part of the "travel ball" concept! The problem usually begins when parents and players are first exposed to real competition! At first, they find it difficult to part with the "conditioning" of conveniently designed safety nets, which are applied inside "recreational" rules. The transition from recreational participation into a competitive environment becomes the initial hurdle. The next hurdle is the discovery that "Travel Ball" becomes an entire "family" commitment and that they soon lose the "complaisant" luxury they once enjoyed in the past! (Many postponed BBQ's, pool parties or cancelled weekend trips to Grandma's house). To be part of a "Travel Ball" concept and be successful at it, families now find the need to dedicate more time to baseball clinics, private lessons or to acquire new training methods for their athletes.

Within the older age groups...(usually 13 and above) many travel coaches expect their players to come prepared to play and not to necessarily to use their time for instructional purposes. There are still many capable coaches out there who enjoy teaching their players, however, just as any other popular venue, parents must always exercise good judgment when deciding what's best for their child and family. Assuming that just by being on any travel team is an automatic ticket to improvement, is wrong! Most travel teams are independent clubs and are not governed by a uniform set of rules. It mostly comes down to the level of coaching experience and the competition they are exposed to.

If parents are not careful, what ends up happening more often than not, is that Little Johnny is left out in the cold. Parents quickly forget that they've placed their child in a "competitive environment" and assume that he'll be OK, while maintaining the same level of skill, simply by attending a team practice. Parents will rarely associate their limited involvement, with the fact that Little Johnny may be struggling or underachieving in his performance on the field.

It's very important to maintain the same work ethic and commitment that finally earns a player an opportunity to play on a travel team, but it also requires the same intensity to be spread out throughout the entire season. Most coaches agree that when there's a lack of interest from the parents or the players limit the time that they spend at developing their skills, it will most certainly begin to affect a player's performance on the field. In a competitive environment, someone else is always there, who's willing to work harder to take your place on the playing field!

The Way It really Works...

Most Travel Team coaches recruit their players from local Little League parks, tryouts, newspaper ads or word of mouth. Chances are if the coach has a team near a Little league program, he already knows who the better players are...Many of these coaches have prior experience either as former players, volunteer time at the same recreational league as coaches or as baseball instructors. When they hold tryouts, they usually have a keen sense for spotting potential players or players who display immediate talent. Not only do the coaches possess a higher level of training suitable for competitive baseball, but in addition, many of the parents involved are familiar with the responsibility and dedication required to expose their own children in this competitive field! Many of the successful families who make the commitment to take part in Travel Baseball, also know that a child cannot simply show up for a team practice and be expected to excel or

improve within the one-two hour practice held by his team coach. Players and parents find additional ways to stay sharp by seeking a private instructor, visit the batting cages regularly, attend baseball camps or clinics or design rigid baseball drills of their own, until they meet once again with the team coach.

The Nature of the Beast!

"If you think this is a bit too much, rest assured there's somebody else out there who thinks that he hasn't done enough! The funny part is that he's probably standing right next to you!"

The Final Touch...

A combination of factors makes for a successful Travel Team. It begins with the Head Coach. The head coach is usually one with experience, who's dedicated, spends many hours involved in making important arrangements and decisions for the team. His involvement most often goes on...way beyond the couple of hours after the game or when a practice has ended! He sacrifices much of his own family and personal time to share his baseball wisdom on the field and displays a genuine desire to teach young athletes, which becomes his primary motivation...He's a volunteer!

The players are usually "self-motivated", dedicated to improving their own game, regardless of the team's skill level. They also possess a strong desire to compete. Their parents are dedicated to providing them with whatever tools are necessary to help the athlete reach a level of success. The parents also become part of the "complete package". Too often, a coach has a player on his roster that's not worth the trouble that the parents add to the team. A coach would much prefer having the nice parents of an average player than an above average player with uncooperative parents. Supportive parents are always welcome, especially when they understand that the head coach of a Travel team is just a volunteer!

Lastly, a coach hopes that parents always remember that when they expose their child to a competitive environment like Travel Baseball is...it is the family's responsibility to make sure the player maintains a high level of motivation and skill, along with maintaining the dedication required to follow thru with the commitment! We should NEVER forget that as parents, nobody ever puts a gun to our head and says that you must have your son playing travel baseball! When your son is selected and finally given an opportunity to play, we all agree to the conditions and terms set forth by this competitive environment. You can't simply decide to change the rules and conditions as you go...to suit your personal needs. Ultimately, our own child suffers for it! Travel baseball is designed to compete and bring out the highest level of competition from our players. Because of this, we choose to expose our child to failure or disappointment at any time, not the coach! The best part of it all is that the good times are much more rewarding when we ultimately expose our children to one of the biggest lessons in life...When you work hard...and succeed...it feels very rewarding! It's much like real life, itself!