

The All Stars Experience

The All stars experience is a unique opportunity for baseball players and their families to build new friendships in the context of a competitive baseball experience. This summary highlights some of the features of this once in a lifetime opportunity.

The uniqueness of all stars

All stars is often a series of "firsts." All stars is the first experience of truly competitive athletics for many boys and girls. It is the first time to play before large crowds (several hundred at the district level, as many as ten thousand at the regional finals). It is the first time many children feel the pressure to perform and win. All stars is also the first time many players are not the best player on the team. They must learn to sit on the bench, contribute when given a limited opportunity, and share the success the team achieves. These "firsts" are challenging for every player, and their parents. This can create a significant learning experience.

The goals of all stars

All stars in Danvers American Little League have four unique goals. The first is to provide an intensive clinic/camp type experience. Although only two or three coaches are officially named to the team, other coaches may work with the team in practice. Precise skills for each position are taught. Intensive work on the finer points of the game are covered. Players are able to develop much more rapidly in this environment, both because of the coaching and the quality of their peers in practice.

The second goal is to provide a great team/friend building experience. As one boy said, "All stars is not about baseball. It's about friends." Well said! The game is simply the context in which players and their families bond in unique ways and develop significant friendships. The intensity of all stars, coupled with the competitive environment, deepens the bonds of those who share the experience.

The third goal is to build lifelong positive memories. Many people who play in Little League all stars remember it fondly, have memorabilia which they save into adulthood, and remember the experience as a focal point of family life during the late childhood years.

Finally, while Danvers American Little League promotes equal play/participation throughout its regular season program, all stars is different. The fourth goal of all stars for DALL is to win tournaments and advance a team as far as possible each year in the tournaments we enter.

The differences between the regular season and all stars

All stars is a different experience from the regular season for players AND THEIR PARENTS. It is, as the Little League rulebook says, "a whole new ball game." Failure to recognize this can create frustration and disappointment for the players AND THEIR PARENTS. There are three major differences from the regular season parents should note and be prepared for.

First, your child will fail more during all stars. While they were a dominating player on the regular season team, he/she may not be in all stars. Be prepared for this. Have realistic expectations and help your child adjust to his/her diminished results. There are still eighteen outs per team in an all star game, and now some all star must make them!

Second, you will have less control/influence than during the regular season. The tournaments are controlled by the Tournament Committee in Williamsport, PA and through the local District Administrators. Danvers American Little League has no control over tournament operations. While you were able to influence the decisions made in your league by talking with Board members, this influence is not available during tournament play.

Finally, all stars is played by different rules than the regular season. Free substitution and roster batting are not used in tournament play. Other rules restrict substitutions, pitching availability, and player utilization. The result of these rules is that some players will play very little...and must learn to cooperate with the manager who makes the playing time decisions.

Parents make the difference

The most influential people in all stars are the parents of the players. By their attitude, effort, cooperation, and contributions, the team is able to succeed. Here are five brief suggestions for parents in all stars, followed by a section on volunteering as a parent helper.

First, do not coach your child – particularly during the games. Do not sit in the bleachers and shout instructions, comments, or suggestions. Leave all of this to the coaching staff. If you struggle with this, sit in the outfield out of earshot of your child.

Second, do not criticize the coaches or any teammates. Be careful about playing time comments or casual remarks. Remember, playing time is the crucial and controversial issue in all stars. The manager is staying awake late at night stressing about who, when, and how to play all his players. These are never easy decisions. Give them the benefit of the doubt on their decisions and help your child do the same.

Third, be flexible. All stars is a very complex process. It is seldom a smooth process. Despite intense efforts to make detailed plans, things sometimes change quickly. Be patient and contribute to solutions to problems as they arise.

Four, provide unyielding support for your child. Root them on during the game and give a hug when it's done – win or lose, hero or goat. In the long run, your support will be more meaningful to them than the results of any baseball game.

Finally, be sure your child eats and sleeps properly during all stars. As they develop new friendships, sleepovers and team activities happen frequently. Encourage these, except on the night before a game. On those nights, have your child home in bed at the proper time.

Volunteering as a parent helper

Parents are the staff of the all star team. The following jobs are needed to make the all star experience all it can be. Two or more volunteers can share some of these jobs.

The method of accomplishing each of the following can be structured to fit each team's unique needs. Here are some of the jobs:

1. Scorekeeper – Although district personnel keep the official game records, each team may need a scorekeeper to assist the manager with an accurate record of both teams in every game.
2. Equipment manager – This person gets all the equipment (and there is a lot in all stars) to and from the games and cleans the dugout after each game.
3. Snack coordinator – This person provides a healthy snack in the middle of each practice or prior to each game. This is usually done best with donations from the parents and one or two people providing the snack to assure quality control and on time service.
5. Party coordinator – This person arranges team parties. This could be a family party after the first week of practice, a "spontaneous" party if the team wins a tournament, or an end of all stars team party to celebrate the end of the all stars season.
6. Spirit coordinator – This person coordinates making spirit items (banner, signs, pompoms, pennants, balloons, etc.) and builds spirit among the crowd during the games.
7. Phone coordinator – This person assists the manager by making phone calls to players and their families.

Thank you for taking the time to read and learn what the Danvers American Little League All Star Experience is all about.