

In-House Baseball vs.Travel Baseball:

A PERSPECTICE

The subject of this Question & Answer exercise addresses the decision parents' struggle with regarding their sons' baseball experience. It is primarily directed at parents of 9, thru 12 year olds players of their current baseball year.

It is broken into 7 questions listed here:

QUESTION 1. SHOULD I HAVE MY SON PLAY ANOTHER YEAR OF IN-HOUSE/REC BALL?

QUESTION 2. SHOULD I MOVE MY SON TO A TRAVEL TEAM AND LEAVE IN HOUSE/REC BALL BEHIND?

QUESTION 3. SHOULD I TRY AND DO BOTH; PLAY ON MY IN HOUSE/REC BALL TEAM & JOIN A "PART TIME" TRAVEL TEAM?

QUESTION 4. SHOULD I SIGN UP FOR THE IN HOUSE/REC TEAM AND ALSO PLAY FOR THE TRAVEL TEAM THAT MY IN HOUSE/REC PROGRAM PROVIDES?

QUESTION 5. MY SON MADE THE TOURNAMENT TEAM (ALL STAR TEAM) AND THEY HAVE A GREAT TEAM. I WANT HIM TO HAVE A CHANCE TO PLAY FOR THE CHAMPIONSHIP WHEN HE IS 12 BECAUSE OUR TEAM IS AWESOME. WHY SHOULD I TAKE THAT CHANCE AWAY FROM HIM?

QUESTION 6. MY SON REALLY LIKES PLAYING WITH HIS FRIENDS FROM SCHOOL. HE IS VERY COMFORTABLE ON HIS LOCAL TEAM, WHY SHOULD I CHANGE THAT?

QUESTION 7 . HOW MUCH DOES IT COST? OUR LOCAL/REC LEAGUE IS PRETTY INEXPENSIVE AND THEY WIN A LOT OF GAMES. WHY SHOULD I SPEND MORE MONEY TO BE ON A TRAVEL TEAM?

Below we will address each question to provide some information to help you with your decision. The opinions below are based on experience(s) over the last 17 years dealing with the above questions. Over that time period, over 5,500 ballplayers come through our programs that includes winter camps, spring/summer seasons, and fall ball. Our coaches, instructors, and advisors have included major / minor league players, college & high school managers/coaches, little league coaches, in house board members, facility owners, tournament directors, umpires, and more. Thus the information provided here does not come from one person, but from combining all of these years of experience and baseball knowledge that comes from the love of the game and the insatiable desire to teach baseball to those that have a passion for the game.

First thing you need to do is identify from what place are you coming from while reading this material and hopefully making a decision which way to go.

- Are you a dad/mom wanting to point your son in the right direction?
- Are you a dad/mom who is ALSO a coach? BIG or should it be HUGE difference than just being a dad/mom?
- Did you play the game? At what level? Have you managed a team? At what level?
- Is this your first son, or have you been through this several times before?
- Are you a mom, dad, aunt, grandparent wondering if your son is "ready" for a higher level of competition, expectation, & responsibility, or you still feel he "has a way to go" before he's ready?

BEFORE we begin to try and ADDRESS the QUESTIONS posed above, please take a moment to read these words.

It is not our position that Travel Ball is better than In-House/Rec Ball.

It is DIFFERENT.

The experience your son will have playing Travel Ball instead of In-House/Rec Ball may not be better.

It will be DIFFERENT.

Does different = better? No, not necessarily.

The problem is this difference CANNOT be explained it MUST be “experienced.”

Next we will take a look at each of the questions listed above.

QUESTION 1. SHOULD I HAVE MY SON PLAY ANOTHER YEAR OF IN-HOUSE/REC BALL?

The answer is dependent on several things, age, athletic ability, maturity, players love of the game, parents agenda are a few of the factors that come in to play. First thing you might want to do is ask yourself how did last year go? Did your son learn anything, did he enjoy himself, did he make any NEW friends, did his love of the game increase, decrease, or stay the same? Was he excited about going to practice? Did he look forward to putting his uniform on to get to the field to play the game? Did he improve as much as hoped for by being challenged by his coaches, teammates, and competition?

Most of the time we hear more NO's than YESES to those questions. IF all you seek is for your son to go to the same field 3 times a week and play the same 4 or 5 teams during the year then IN-HOUSE might be the way to go. IF your player is one of the better players then you will enjoy watching the manager parade him out to the mound every third game and strike out a bunch of batters. You will probably enjoy watching him hit the ball and beam with pride as he gets his 3rd or 4th inside the park home run as the defense throws the ball all over the place. We had a player on our team one year that was struggling game after game to get a hit on our travel team. His mom came up and said “I don't understand why he is not hitting for the (travel team here) because yesterday in his IN-HOUSE game hit had 3 hits.” Wow, we thought that's great, So, we asked “where did he hit the ball?” The mom enthusiastically began explaining that the first time up he “HIT” the ball to the pitcher but the pitcher threw the ball over the first baseman's head and he ran all the way to second! The second HIT was to the 3rd baseman and the ball went under his glove into left field! The third and final HIT was a pop-up to the right fielder who ran in and the ball went over his head!. When we explained those were errors and not hits, she explained “but he HIT the ball so that's 3 HITS..... IN-HOUSE/REC BALL vs. TRAVEL explained right there.

QUESTION 2. SHOULD I MOVE MY SON TO A TRAVEL TEAM AND LEAVE IN HOUSE/REC BALL BEHIND?

Does your son love baseball, does he love the “game”? Is he an athlete? Does he like to be challenged? Does he want to play for his H.S. team? Does he want to make the varsity squad as a sophomore? Is the H.S. he is likely to go to have a successful competitive program? Does he like making new friends? Are you getting tired of “bad” baseball? Does he have a daddy-coach? Does your IN-House board members favor their own kids and disregard the others?

Well if you answered yes to some of those questions then it is probably time to move on..

Now if some of these are familiar to you. “No, he doesn't love baseball he likes playing sometimes”. “Yes, its hard to get him to practice sometimes as he doesn't always seem to want to go.” “No, my son does not like too many challenges or being called out if he makes a mistake, he just shuts down and gives up.” ‘Not sure if he wants to

play baseball in HS, he might play football or basketball or all three sports.” “Sure he likes making new friends but would rather play baseball with the kids he goes to school with. “ “We don’t have bad baseball in our league, we won district last year!” “No, his dad does not coach, the pitchers dad is the coach, he has a hitting stick & a batting net, and a pitching machine, and a tablet with a baseball program on it!” “I am not on the board of our league but my son made the All Stars because he is really good.”

Well if this is more like your train of thought then IN-HOUSE/REC BALL will work just fine.

QUESTION 3. SHOULD I TRY AND DO BOTH; PLAY ON MY IN HOUSE/REC BALL TEAM & JOIN A "PART TIME" TRAVEL TEAM?

Good one. Makes sense when you say it or read the question here.

BUT sorry folks IT DOESN'T WORK.

It's 2 different things. Sooner or later good players will move on to full time independent travel teams.

Unfortunately most do it too late. So some parents want the “best of both worlds.” Our travel program has tried this since our inception 17 years ago. A mistake. The travel game is played at different length bases, different length pitchers mound, bigger outfields, faster pitchers, aggressive base running, lead-offs, balks, signs, hit & runs, more, more, more.

The IN-HOUSE game was created over 75 years ago with rules that leveled the playing field so that EVERYONE who wanted to play baseball could play no matter their ability. This WAS & IS a great thing. Most of the rules are basically the same. But the “WAY” the game is taught and played is COMPLETELY different.

It is too much to ask a 9, 10, 11, 12 year old to learn two different ways to play the same game. Read this experience, it is a good example of the difference in the game. Several years back our IN-HOUSE 12 year old team had 8 of our travel players on the team. That year the IN-HOUSE team went 22-2 and 6-0 in post season playoffs. NOW, the record is not important. What was important was the 8 travel players were playing a different game. Going from 1st to 3rd, hitting the cut-off man. Throwing a change-up instead of a fast ball down the middle with an 0-2 count.

During that season this actually occurred. First, know that the travel players expect our taught to be aggressive. We teach the players that they may get one good pitch to hit and it may be the first pitch they see, so we encourage-no we insist they go up there ‘READY’ to hit. So, here we are at an IN-HOUSE game and one of the travel players comes up to bat. First pitch right down the middle, our batter took it strike one, next pitch same spot strike 2. Next pitch batter swings. Misses, strike 3.

So I asked the batter (remember this is a travel player –part time that year) “ why did you take the first two pitches, they were perfect, right down the middle?” The player looked me in the eyes and said the manager (IN-HOUSE manager) told him NOT to swing until he had two strikes. I then found out that he had told ALL the players to “crowd the plate” and “don’t swing until you get 2 strikes.” So, being of an inquisitive mind I asked the manager if in fact he had told the team to “crowd the plate and don’t swing until you get two strikes on you” The manager said of course he did and began to explain to me that the pitcher on the other team was their best pitcher and we had to get the “pitch count” up so that we could get him out the game. This is IN-HOUSE baseball thinking, how can we expect the kids to go from that ridiculous instruction to teaching them how to play the game correctly?

QUESTION 4. SHOULD I SIGN UP FOR THE IN HOUSE/REC TEAM AND ALSO PLAY FOR THE TRAVEL TEAM THAT MY IN HOUSE/REC PROGRAM PROVIDES?

That is a fine idea provided you don't actually believe that the IN-HOUSE travel team is actually a travel team. The IN-HOUSE/REC PROGRAM(s) exists for a reason. They are hugely IMPORTANT to a thriving community providing EVERY boy that wants play baseball regardless of his ability to play on a "travel team". These "in-house" are just as important as the library, the parks, scouts, etc. They are part of the community, the town you live in. Travel Teams were not created to compete with these leagues. They were created to provide the small percentage of talented players an alternative environment to receive advanced coaching and a higher level of competition.

Over the years many of the daddy-coaches will have their son try out and join a travel team. They were surprised to find out that on this team their son didn't always pitch or play shortstop and bat 1st. The managers of these teams actually treated this player the same as all the other players.

NO SPECIAL TREATMENT!

Well that wasn't going to work for these guys so what did they do?? They started their own travel teams. Problem solved. NOW we get to the next bunch of daddy/coaches. THESE guys simply figured out well lets create a "travel/in-house/rec team" which will be made up of all our kids, and our coaches, and friends, and guys on the board kids. Then they decided "lets get new jerseys, new hats and use the IN-HOUSE fields, insurance, equipment, etc. for these few players". Best part they decided was that we can have the SAME IN-HOUSE/REC managers/coaches to coach a completely different game against teams and players that were EXCLUSIVELY playing travel baseball. Hey, change hats and you go from a daddy coach to a baseball coach. You figure out how that's going to work out.

Just because you travel to another field that doesn't qualify you as a travel team.

QUESTION 5. MY SON MADE THE TOURNAMENT TEAM (ALL STAR TEAM) AND THEY HAVE A GREAT TEAM. I WANT HIM TO HAVE A CHANCE TO PLAY FOR THE CHAMPIONSHIP WHEN HE IS 12 BECAUSE OUR TEAM IS AWESOME. WHY SHOULD I TAKE THAT CHANCE AWAY FROM HIM?

First, congratulations on your son making his tournament team (or as many parents refer to it the 'ALL STAR' team). There is no doubt that this particular team is good, and you most likely believe it's the best in a long time. The reality is very simple. Your 12 year old team is NOT going to the Little League World Series. They will NOT get to the Regional Level. There is tiny immeasurable chance they will make it to the State Level. There is a pretty good chance they will make it to Sectional Level because there is little to no competition at the District Level. However winning the District is typically as far as they will go (check the records, it's something like 35 years). Now, ask yourself is that what you want. To spend the month of June / July preparing for the District Tournament only to be eliminated at the next level. One never knows, and of course past performance is no guarantee of future results. However we also all know the definition of insanity.

Now if it's the experience of participation is all you are after then there is no argument that that is a good one. However if you choose to join a travel team this experience will be repeated and enhanced as we participate in many high level World Series class tournaments.

QUESTION 6. MY SON REALLY LIKES PLAYING WITH HIS FRIENDS FROM SCHOOL. HE IS VERY COMFORTABLE ON HIS LOCAL TEAM, WHY SHOULD I CHANGE THAT?

Tough One. Yes playing with friends is a HUGE part of the IN-HOUSE/REC BALL experience. In many cases it's the deal breaker.

Continuing the friendships into each summer is a strong attraction. It's also fun for the parents to get to hang out with the same clique of people that you are comfortable with.

The other view is on a travel team your son will make new friends as a group of young men get together to build a team. Its fun to watch. Also you might meet someone new and interesting as well.

I have lost so many kids for this reason. The only thing I can say is that a HUGE number of the parents will come to me and say "boy I wished we made the move sooner" or "I wish you would have talked me into travel BEFORE he turned 13 or 14 years old."

QUESTION 7 . HOW MUCH DOES IT COST? OUR LOCAL/REC LEAGUE IS PRETTY INEXPENSIVE AND THEY WIN A LOT OF GAMES. WHY SHOULD I SPEND MORE MONEY TO BE ON A TRAVEL TEAM.

It's more expensive than a IN-HOUSE-REC BALL team. So is a Lexus vs. Chevy Spark or Starbucks vs. McDonalds. You get the idea. Travel teams cost more for many reasons, multiple uniforms, tourney fees, field maintenance/rental, sanction fees, insurance, administration, etc. However, the good news is that most reputable travel programs have fundraising plans in place to help off-set the higher fees. Ask about them you will be surprised how easy it is to raise close to 75% toward a travel team fee. So there you have it, a small discussion on the differences between IN-HOUSE/REC BALL & TRAVEL BASEBALL teams.

If you have any questions or require additional information please visit our website at www.illianathunderbolts.com