

Little League International Board of Directors Adopts Change in League Age Determination Date

WILLIAMSPORT, Pa. (May 9, 2005) – The Little League International Board of Directors, governing body for the world's largest organized youth sports program, has accepted a recommendation from USA Baseball to change the league age determination date for its players starting in the 2006 season.

The league age determination date is the age a player has attained as of a specific date, for the purpose of placing the player in a particular division. For more than 55 years in Little League, that date was July 31.

Starting in 2006, the date in all division of Little League Baseball will be April 30 of the current year. The date in all divisions of Little League Softball will be Dec. 31 of the previous year.

For example: Under the old regulation, a baseball player who turns 13 in May, June or July of 2006 would have been considered league-age 13 for the entire season. That would be the case, despite the fact that such a player likely would have played most or all of the regular season (which generally ends in June) without having actually reached his or her 13th birthday. Under the new regulation, such a player will have a league age of 12 throughout the 2006 season.

Under the old softball regulation, a player who turns 13 from January through July of 2006 would have been considered league-age 13 for the entire season. Under the new regulation, such a player will have a league age of 12 throughout the 2006 season.

USA Baseball represents amateur baseball in the U.S. as a member of the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) and the International Baseball Association Federation (IBAF). Virtually every major national youth baseball organization in the U.S., including Little League, is a USA Baseball National Member. USA Baseball recommended that the league age determination date be changed from July 31 to April 30, for the 2006 season for all youth baseball organizations.

The change was made in softball to reflect the fact that most national youth softball organizations use Dec. 31 as the league age determination date.

"The changes in the league age determination dates for Little League Baseball and Softball were approved unanimously by the Little League International Board of Directors," said Stephen D. Keener, president and chief executive officer of Little League Baseball and Softball, and a Director of USA Baseball. "More than four years of study went into this decision, along with years of discussions with our senior volunteers at the local level. I congratulate the board on taking this progressive step."

Also, the Little League International Board of Directors approved a change that provides an option for 12-year-olds to "play up" in the Junior Division. See the question/answer segment below for more information on this, as well as implications for 2006 in the Tee Ball division.

Below, Little League has prepared a list of questions and answers regarding all changes made in conjunction with the new league age determination date. Check back at this page often for the latest information.

1 Q What exactly does "league age determination date" mean?

A The league age determination date is the age a player has attained as of a specific date, for the purpose of placing the player in a particular division. For more than 55 years in Little League, that date was July 31.

2 Q What is the new league age determination date for **baseball**?

A Starting in 2006, the age of a baseball player as of April 30 of the current year will be that player's league age for the current season.

3 Q What is the new league age determination date for **softball**?

A Starting in 2006, the age of a softball player as of Dec. 31 of the previous year will be that player's league age for the current season.

4 Q What is the reason for the change in **baseball**?

A The chief reason is so that most players on a team will spend the majority of the regular season at the same chronological age as their league age. Currently, more than 95 percent of all local Little League

programs start their seasons before May 1. Under the old regulation, a baseball player who turns 13 in May, June or July of the current year would have been considered league-age 13 for that entire season. That would be the case, despite the fact that such a player likely would have played most or all of the regular season (which generally ends in June) without having actually reached his or her 13th birthday. Under the new regulation, such a player will have a league age of 12 throughout the 2006 season.

5 Q What is the reason for the change in **softball**?

A The change was made in softball to reflect the fact that most national youth softball organizations use Dec. 31 as the league age determination date.

6 Q Could this help our league retain more 13-year-old players in the transition to the Junior League Baseball Division where the diamond is the standard size?

A Absolutely. One-fourth of those players who would have been moved up to the Junior League Baseball Division (where they were the youngest of the young) would have another year of eligibility in the Majors Division, and thus may be better prepared for the larger diamond.

7 Q In baseball, what about those players born in May, June or July who would have been league-age five in 2006 (eligible for Tee Ball Baseball), but now will be considered league-age four (not eligible)?

A For one year only, those players will be permitted to register and play in the 2006 Tee Ball Baseball season. They also will be eligible to be placed on a machine-pitch or coach pitch division in Minor League Baseball in 2007 if they have completed a year of Tee Ball Baseball.

8 Q What if a player does not wish to be "held back" as a 12 year old for a second year?

A The Little League International Board of Directors also approved a change that will allow a player who is league-age 12 to try out for a Junior League Division team, starting in 2006. This applies to any player who will be league-age 12. Such a player who is otherwise eligible under all conditions would be eligible for selection to the Junior League Division tournament team. However, if such a player is selected to and participates in one or more regular season games on a Junior League team, he/she will be ineligible to participate in the Major Division from that point forward in regular season and/or tournament play. Again, this will apply starting in 2006. However, a local Little League's board of directors could decide that players league-age 12 in the league will not try out for the Junior League Division, and will be eligible for only the Little League ("Majors") Division/Minor League Division.

9 Q Will this be confusing for leagues with Little League Baseball and Softball programs?

A It should not be. Little League will supply ample educational materials, charts, etc., that will give clear and concise direction to volunteers and parents in determining league age.

10 Q What is USA Baseball?

A USA Baseball is the governing body for amateur baseball in the United States, and represents amateur baseball in the U.S. as a member of the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) and the International Baseball Association Federation (IBAF). Virtually every major national amateur baseball organization in the U.S., including Little League, is a USA Baseball National Member.

11 Q How much research and thought went into this change?

A More than four years of study went into this decision, along with years of discussions with Little League's senior volunteers at the local level.

12 Q Is Little League the only organization making this change?

A No. All indications are that all youth baseball organization members of USA Baseball have or will adopt the same change, and most youth softball organizations have made the change previously. Little League participants make up more than 60 percent of the overall baseball/softball total.

13 Q Why was the July 31 date originally used?

A When the July 31 league age determination date was settled upon in the mid 1940s, Little League was confined to Pennsylvania and a few other states, and it was the only youth baseball organization (for 12-year-olds and below) of any significant size. The date was chosen because it was the date used in Williamsport schools to divide grade levels. When other youth baseball organizations began springing up (primarily for young teens) in the 1950s and '60s, they adopted Little League's determination date so there would be a smooth transition when a player moved from one program to another.

14 Q Why doesn't Little League use the determination date that schools use?

A There are local Little Leagues in every state of the U.S., and scores of countries around the world. Schools in the U.S. use widely different dates to determine the grade in which a child will be. Some use Jan. 1, some use a summer date, and some use a date in the fall. There is not one specific date that could be used that would allow students that are in a particular grade to also be on the same Little League team. All local Little Leagues worldwide must have the same league age determination date.

15 Q What about having 13-year-olds in the Majors? Won't that upset the balance?

A No. The overall average age difference in all divisions of baseball will only be about three months greater. Little League has been advised, in consultation with experts in this field (including Dr. Barry Goldberg, Director of Sports Medicine at Yale University and Chairman of the USA Baseball Medical and Safety Advisory Board), that the physiological differences (based on this change) in children of this age will be miniscule, and negligible at best. The overall age difference in softball will be seven months greater – also a negligible difference particularly since the field is the same size.

16 Q What about having 13-year-olds playing with nine-year-olds?

A The age difference between the potential oldest player on the field and the potential youngest player will not change. In baseball, just as the league-age 12-year-old players will be an average of three months older, the league-age nine-year-old players also will be an average of three months older. In softball, just as the league-age 12-year-old players will be an average of seven months older, the league-age nine-year-old players also will be an average of seven months older.

17 Q Does this change mean that one age group will have to "skip" a year and move up sooner?

A No. Every player in all divisions will still have the opportunity to have one full season each year at each age group. No player will be forced to "move up" any sooner than he/she would under the old league age determination date.

18 Q Does this change mean that some players will receive two years of eligibility at a certain age?

A Yes. Baseball players with birth dates in May, June or July of 2005 will be the same league age for the 2006 season. Softball players with birth dates from January through July of 2005 will be the same league age for the 2006 season. For example: A player who was born on July 15, 1993, is a league age 12-year-old for the 2005 season. That player will AGAIN be a league-age 12-year-old for the 2006 season. Remember, however, this will only be the case for one year only.

19 Q Will it be difficult for local leagues to institute these changes?

A It should not be. For baseball, the simplest way of explaining it is this...A baseball player's chronological age on April 30 of the year in question is his/her league age for that year (starting in 2006). For softball...A softball player's chronological age on the previous Dec. 31 is his/her league age for the current year (starting in 2006).

20 Q Could our local league or district institute this change for the 2005 season?

A No. The change, as approved by the Little League International Board of Directors, takes effect in 2006. For the 2005 season, including Tournament Play, the July 31 date must be used in determining the league age of every participant in all divisions.

Note: The four items listed below were added on May 11, 2005.

21 Q What if a team has more than the eight players who are league age 12 next year, in violation of Regulation III (c), as a result of some players having an "extra" year as league age 12-year-olds?

A The Little League International Rules Committee will be addressing that issue soon, as well as the number of 12-year-olds that can pitch in a week (Regulation VI (c)). Check back here for details often.

22 Q In softball, what about those players born from January through July who would have been league-age five in 2006 (eligible for Tee Ball Softball), but now will be considered league-age four (not eligible)?

A For one year only, those players will be permitted to register and play in the 2006 Tee Ball Softball season. They also will be eligible to be placed on a machine-pitch or coach pitch division in Minor League Softball in 2007 if they have completed a year of Tee Ball Softball.

- 23 Q** Within our local league structure, could our local league board of directors maintain that league-age 12-year-olds in our league will not be eligible to “move up” to the Junior Division, even if it means they will be playing a second year as a league-age 12-year-old?
- A** Yes. A local Little League’s board of directors could decide that players league-age 12 will not try out for the Junior League Division, and will be eligible for only the Little League (“Majors”) Division/Minor League Division.
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- 24 Q** Within our local league structure, could our local league board of directors maintain that all league-age 12-year-olds in our league must “move up” to the Junior Division?
- A** No. In all cases, any player who is league age 12 must be permitted to try out for and, if selected, play in the Little League (“Majors”) Division.
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Note: The two items listed below were added on May 12, 2005.

- 25 Q** Could our local Little League permit a player who is league age eight in 2005, and will be league age eight again in 2006 (because of the change in the league age determination date), to “move up” to the Little League (“Majors”) Division in 2006?
- A** No. However, the local Little League board of directors may choose to request a waiver from the Charter Committee in Williamsport. The Charter Committee in Williamsport will review all the facts presented, and its decision is final. The process for applying for a waiver of any rule or regulation is on Page 11 of the rulebooks. Note that this applies only to the Little League (“Majors”) Division. The alignment of the Minor Division (machine pitch, coach pitch, player pitch) of players 7-12 years old is entirely up to the local Little League board of directors.
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- 26 Q** Where can I find separate age charts for baseball and softball for the 2006 season?
- A** They are posted on-line at <http://www.littleleague.org/leagueofficials/forms.asp>. Remember, these charts do not take effect until Jan. 1, 2006.