

# The Future – It's in the Stars!



**The grass  
really is  
greener....**

**So,  
Let's water  
Our lawn!**



We have been on the all-star experiment for a couple of years. Much has been learned. Some of it positive and good. Some of it negative and challenging. We elected to do a statewide Legion all-star event (not because it was easy). We felt it was something that was needed, and that people would respond positively. They did respond.

## State All-Star Event – Keep it Going!

We have reported to you about what we did and what we think we need to do going forward to further develop and improve an event that puts our state's top Legion players center stage. We want the event to be first-class. We want to showcase the Minnesota American Legion in a positive and modern light. We need to be recognized not as an experiment but as an official event of Legion baseball.

## What Did We Learn in the Process?

Perhaps we knew it all along or at least have heard it for years.

- Legion baseball was once the top brand of baseball. All the best players wanted to be Legion players. There was nothing else.
- Legion baseball was built on a school district model. Legion teams are essentially single-community teams, or single high school teams.
- Every coach (and every player and every parent) believe that you get better when you play with better players (are pushed and challenged) and you get better by playing better competition.
- Legion players can only play in their single community with other players only of that single district. Likewise, single -district teams play only single-district teams.
- Multi-community teams developed allowing kids, especially top players, to play with other top players and play against teams similarly comprised of top players. These are travel or club teams.
- Club teams are multi-community teams: club teams are nothing more than all-star teams in their concept.
- Club teams have duplicated much of the Legion program: 1) They play from high school end until the end of July/Early August; 2) They play in their own league games during the week; 3) They play in a few tournaments that have other all-star teams; 4) They provide after summer playing opportunities and training.

## With Some Rude Awakenings

What we did not fully appreciate was how significantly multi-community teams have impacted Legion baseball, especially in two areas: 1) Legion baseball is not considered to be the best brand of baseball

anymore; 2) The movement of top players away from Legion ball has been greater than I had imagined or knew. Observations:

- Legion players telling Legion coaches – Legion does not help me get to college. Legion baseball isn't good anymore.
- Players and parents telling us that club teams elevate player's visibility for colleges (clubs do)
- College coaches – 'Great to see the all-star event. We can see more outstate players – the most of best kids in the Metro are on the club teams.'
- An analysis of the PBR Top Ranked players in classes 2021,22 and 22 revealed less than 10% claimed a Legion team as their sole or as their lead team.
- Most Legion folks have observed a reduction in the quality of play in midseason tournament play and the play in substate and state tournaments.
- Many of our 2022 Legion All-Star players also play on club teams including many outstate kids. It is not just metro.

### **We in Legion Have Given Players and Parents No Alternatives**

Have our Legion heads have been stuck in the sand?

- We have argued that club ball is pay-to-play (it is!); That club ball is expensive (it is!); That you don't need a club to get you into college baseball (you don't).
- It is clear and it is an unmistakable truth – parents and players, especially the better or top players, want to play on all-star (multi-community) teams.
- They have opened their check books; they have traveled to games and tournaments at significant cost and effort; they have suffered inconveniences. All of it to get the opportunity to play with and against the better players.

It is this simple: We in Legion ball have given players NO OTHER OPTION beyond staying inside your base school district borders. No options. No choices.

### **Yes, We Can! And it Might Be Easier Than You Think**

What did we learn over the past two years with the all-star experiment?

Legion families and Legion players (and coaches) WANT the multi-community option from Legion baseball.

Yes. They do!

Players. Parents. Coaches. College coaches. All of them have made it clear.

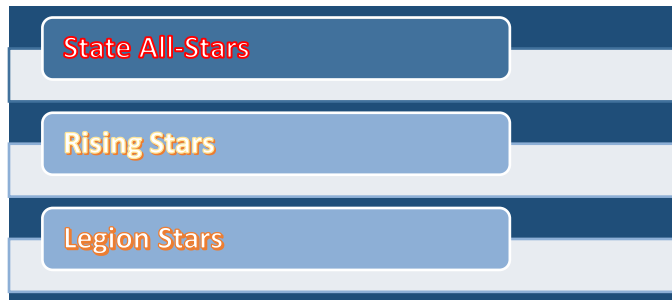
They want opportunities and they will play on Legion all-star teams.

It is Field of Dreams stuff: Build it – They will come!

### **Legion is absolutely able to develop multi-community teams, leagues and tournaments.**

- We have the base teams already to draw from – 380 of them.
- We have the coaches to implement them. Many of them good coaches and wanting something more to offer their players and communities.
- We have over 5,000 players to draw from. They don't all want to play inside their school boundaries and we know it!
- We have organizational structures that can communicate and facilitate within the Legion Baseball and the American Legion organizations.

## **Stars on a Simple Flag: Here is What It Might Look Like**



1) **The State All-Star Tournament Event – Senior Level**

- a. We already have it. We have a statewide all-star event. Or we have at least built the base of it. It is a focal point already.
- b. Continues as the showcase event for Legion players returning to high school in the coming fall.
- c. The goal is to have players that are the top Legion players at each position in one tournament
- d. Keep improving it

2) **The Rising Stars - League and Tournament**

- a. This is targeted at the Junior level players that are the top up-and-coming junior kids. These are the senior players of tomorrow.
- b. Offering this opportunity for younger players should (and we think will) add to the attraction of Legion baseball and diminish the need to play exclusively on club teams
- c. We ran a statewide junior level all-star event in 2021. We do not think that is the way to go for juniors. Combo Teams will better affect far more players and base teams.

**d. Forming a Team of 15 Players**

- i. Example – Combine five teams. Each team has three player slots. Four teams might have four slots per team or 16 total. It's flexible.
- ii. Coaches work together to fill player and coach positions. Coaches best know their players.
- iii. They may rotate players from base teams during the season. Season play rosters need not be fixed.
- iv. Consider some maximum enrollment levels if necessary. That may encourage more teams to form and allows more players from each community to participate.
- v. To be eligible, a player must meet the junior Legion birthdate requirement. The player must be rostered on a Legion team. Otherwise, Legion insurance would not attach.
- vi. Age eligible players may be solely on a senior team.
- vii. Coaches must be registered with the Legion and all requirements must be completed

**e. Regular Season – Suggest 5 Games**

- i. Play in All-Star Tuesdays by setting aside that day/night
- ii. Coaches schedule games, fields and umpires as they do now
- iii. Costs for each of the 5 base teams (comprising one hypothetical Rising Star squad)

1. ½ of one umpire for one game (umps are split between both game teams)
2. 2 or 3 new baseballs for one game out of the five Tuesday games
3. If that cost was \$75 for the league games – that equates to a cost of \$25 a player for 5 league all-star games. Compare that \$25 to club costs.
4. Could a participating base team cover the \$75? Or would the participating team charge their players \$25? Decision: Up to that base team.
5. Costs are clearly minimal
6. Players compete in the own uniforms and caps.

**f. Mid-Season Rising Star Tournaments**

- i. An in-season Rising Star tournament certainly could be developed
  1. Existing communities and organizations could develop such an event just as they already put on tournaments of single community teams.
  2. Cost sharing, entry fees and other factors are determined at the local level
  3. Each team can decide whether to fund its share of the cost or to charge each player a fee
  4. Flexibility in rosters allows team coaches to have pitching as well as accommodate rostered players that might have other commitments
  5. In season tournaments reduce the argument that Legion does not provide enough top competition
- ii. Outside Tournaments
  1. There would be nothing to preclude one of the Rising Stars teams to play in other tournaments. The choice would be up to the coaches, players and parents of that team
  2. Two or more Rising Star teams could combine to play in an outside tournament (remember – Legion insurance attaches to the Legion PLAYER – you are covered)
  3. Costs associated with such tournaments are the responsibility of each team or combination team

**g. Year End Tournament**

- i. Some form of post season playoff or tournament should be developed. What might that look like?
  1. How many teams might be in a playoff?
    - a. All Rising Star teams participate
      - i. Schedule games on home fields
      - ii. Perhaps have a “Final Four” at a final site
      - iii. Final site is a one-day Mini Bracket – Round One - two games to qualify. Round Two - winner vs. winner for the championship and second place, loser vs. loser plays for third and fourth place.
      - iv. The goal would be to start and finish in the week following the Legion state tournaments – Monday to final Sunday
    - b. Or some format of a Rising Star year-end tournament is developed depending on the number of Rising Star teams that develop.

- i. Source a host site
  - ii. Develop the playing structure.
- c. Ultimately you can't pre-determine the year end playoff or tournament without a sense of how many Future Stars teams are ultimately formed. We think that a yearend tournament is essential.

#### **h. Other Opportunities**

- i. The player in the all-star (Future Stars) group is the most likely to want an extended season or a fall ball season. Those wishing to develop such a concept would have a potential jump start
- ii. Those wishing to develop an even higher-level team to travel to top tournaments would have a base of Future Stars that could feed such a concept.

#### **i. Implementing Rising Stars 2023**

##### **i. First Focus – Junior Legion Division 1 Metro**

- 1. There are over 40 teams that will meet in one place in early February making it somewhat easier to present and get reactions.
- 2. There are two levels of teams – the very competitive league and the not as competitive league
- 3. The 2023 goal would be to develop at least four Future Stars teams out of the competitive league. Based on responses to the 2021 and 2022 state all-star nominations, one would expect to see or recruit at least the four-squad minimum as a first-year experiment.
- 4. The second tier may have interest as well.
- 5. Additional personnel are needed to guide this effort as Future Stars develops. Would that be a committee of coaches? Would they be supervised by the development committee or group?

##### **ii. Second Focus – Statewide**

- 1. Should interest be found in our core group, the initiative should be opened for other combination teams to form. They will hear about it anyway. There is no reason to hide it.
- 2. Parameters such as a maximum combined school enrollment level may assist in providing some format and parameters.
- 3. Teams could form from a common geography.
- 4. Teams could form because coaches know each other.
- 5. Outstate teams should attempt to play against other Future Stars teams during the regular season to the extent geography makes it possible.
- 6. Outstate teams could form a Future Stars team and enroll in a yearend tournament even if that team did not play Future Stars league games.

#### **j. Conclusion**

- i. We do not think that a State All Star event works particularly well for the junior age level. It takes a great deal of effort and expense but can only benefit a few players playing on one weekend.
- ii. Future Stars offers far more options to coaches and communities. You elevate the competitive options for all participating single school programs.
- iii. The Future Stars concept is relatively easy to present at least to those attending the February Junior Metro meeting
- iv. There may be no interest at all.

- v. There may be more interest than expected.
- vi. The approach is organic – it is based in communities and is substantially coach driven.
- vii. The concept is frankly very cost efficient.

### **3) Legion Stars – League & Tournament**

- a. The Legion Stars level targets players that are on senior level teams and will be returning to high school in the fall.
- b. The Legion Star would be the players that want the most out of baseball and have the skills and drive to make it happen.
- c. The state All-Star event takes just 60 players across the entire state. The selection process limits how many players might be in the statewide event to one or two maximum per base program. The objective is to have the very best Legion players in the state which suggests the showcase all-star event benefits the only most exceptional players. That is 60 players out of more than 3,000 registered on senior Legion team rosters.
- d. We know that many, many communities have more than one player (or two) that are dedicated to baseball and hope to make it to a college level. These are often quality players that likely form the nucleus of that area's team for the next year. Creating a combination team comprised of several member teams will provide added opportunities for the top tier players to play with better players and play against better competition.
- e. Utilize the same coach driven approach outlined for the junior Future Stars level.
- f. Conversations have begun with several leagues and teams around the metro area. Response has been uniformly positive.
- g. A minimum of four or five Legion Stars teams would be the minimum needed to experiment in 2023.
- h. Legion Stars players would be the most likely players to get selected to the State All-Star Tournament. They would need to be replaced on the Legion Stars roster.
- i. Legion Stars, with an in-season schedule plus a year end tournament, gives Legion a model that directly competes with club teams for the summer months.
- j. Legion Stars teams (or combinations of Legion Stars team) could attend in-season out-of-town tournaments should players and coaches want to attend an elite tournament or two.

**If our experiment is successful, Legion baseball will immediately have competitive multi-community opportunities.**

**That is what people tell us they want. It is what players and families are choosing when they enroll in a club or travel program.**

**The best players and the best baseball can be found with a Legion label on it!**

**Give the people what they want.**

**Or, as we have seen, they will get it somewhere else.**

**Drop the school district fences!**

**Raise the level of play and raise the level of competition!**

**Coaches – You have the power to bring change and new opportunity.**

**Coaches say they want more. They tell us they want to fight back against the clubs.**

**This is not hard. This is not costly.**

**We need to work together. And we can!**

