

Local Little League swings into action

By *Lés Pierres Streater*
Sentinel-Voice

The sounds of America's favorite past-time will soon fill the diamond at Doolittle Park, and similar facilities throughout the Valley. At Doolittle, dozens of children could barely contain their excitement as they completed applications, paid their fees, got fitted for their uniforms, talked about the positions they wanted and hit the field for game-day exercises—all in anticipation for the upcoming Little League baseball season.

The lucky youngsters who will test their skills at Doolittle will do on a renovated field featuring turf sidelines and warning tracks, a pre-game workout area for home and visiting teams, a revamped infield and a resodded outfield.

Adrian Jimenez, a sixth grader at Finley Middle School, hopes to emulate the success of his favorite pro, Manny Ramirez of the Los Angeles Dodgers, and to have a blast in the process.

"It's fun playing baseball because you're active, getting exercise, meeting new friends, and working as a team," he said. "I've been playing organized baseball for the last three years and I enjoy the opportunity to learn new things and improve my chances for going pro after high school and college."

"It means a lot to me to be out here today," noted Xavier Tanner, an eighth grader at Mannion Middle School. "I've been playing baseball for the last seven years and I love the competition. I play pitcher, third base, and left field, where it takes a lot of stamina to compete, speed to run around the bases and in the outfield, and wanting to win in a friendly but competitive way."

While young people dominate the action on the field, parents are very much involved in the off-field success of their children and of the sport. They provide moral support, corrective discipline (when needed) and, often serve as chief fundraisers for the team.

Adrian Jimenez's mother, Juana Berlanga, said sports have strengthened their familial bond. "Not only does it keep my son out of trouble or hanging out in the streets, but it encourages him to exercise, and learn from being involved in a team sport where he is interacting with

other players plus developing the skills necessary to compete professionally. We have now developed a good bond between ourselves, and I also serve as one of the team moms."

Andrenetta Gardner got inspired by watching how sports energized both children and parents. She couldn't wait to sign up her son for Little League. "I didn't want my son hanging around the house watching television and not being active, so I brought him out here today to start playing baseball and meeting other kids in a positive environment. He will be surrounded by some caring adults and mentors who will help him along the way and support him as he matures and learns the game of baseball."

Though Little League Baseball as a national sport is decades old, local inner-city programs such as Community Little League have been around less than 10 years. Ricky Towers, Sr., president of the local Community Little League chapter, said the urban-oriented program focuses on attracting youth interested in baseball but who may not have the resources or outlets to pursue it.

Towers said the program exposes inner-city youth to new experiences, such as games at Cashman Field, trips to San Diego to meet with the San Diego Padres of the Major League Baseball, guest speakers on a range and out-of-state trips to compete with other teams.

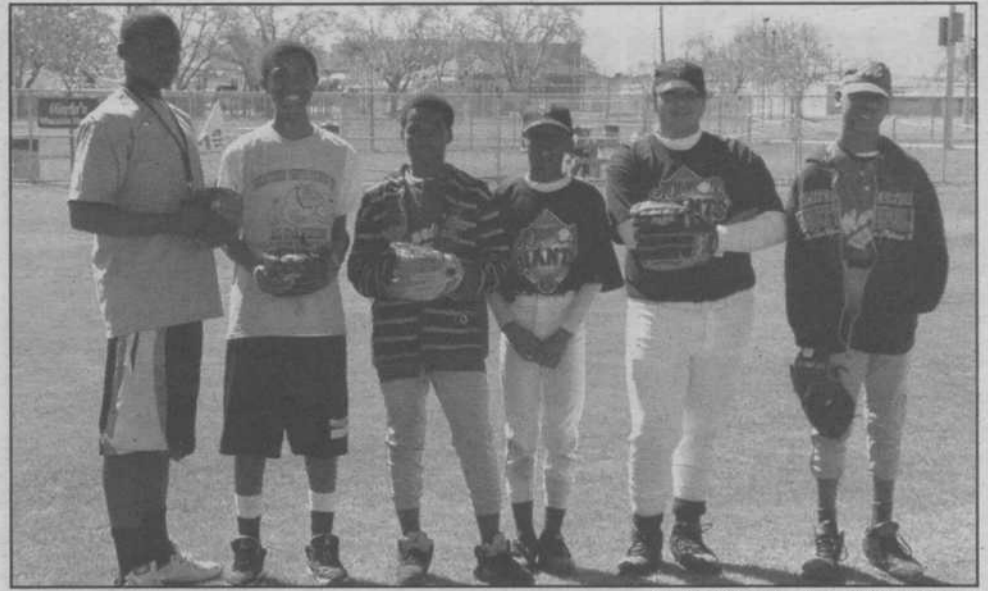
"During the month of March, we come out and start our recruiting effort to register new players for the upcoming season," Towers said. "We play baseball from the second week of April until the end of June, and then we prepare for the city tournament, which gives us city, state, and national opportunities to compete for those titles. Our major goals are mentorship, crime prevention, education, teaching the players the fundamentals of baseball that they can use in high school, college, and in the pros, along with becoming good citizens and career-minded young adults."

Depending on their age, players are assigned to different leagues.

Five- and six-year-old players are in the Tee Ball League. Seven- and eight-year-olds are in the Minor

League. Nine- and 10-year-olds play in their own league. Eleven- and 12-year-olds compete in the Major League. Thirteen- and 14-year-olds are in the Junior League, while those who are 15 and 16 years old battle in the Senior League. Ages five to 12 play on a 60-foot diamond field. Players age 13-16 play on a 90-foot diamond field.

Enrollment is \$90 and (See Baseball, Page 11)



Sentinel-Voice photo by Lés Pierres Streater

Sandlot ballplayers, left to right, Peirre Williams, Divonte Preston, Sam Dotie, Various McNeal, Angelica Jardine, and Micah Hogan are looking forward to the new baseball season coming up. Community Little League is geared toward attracting inner-city youth.

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