

The Jr. Optimist Baseball/Softball League

The Jr. Optimist Baseball League ("JOBBL") started as an offshoot of the Optimist Club of Concord in 1963. Its original location was formally known as the "Smokestack" Area at Cowell and Ygnacio Valley Roads in Concord. A lease that provided for the construction of several baseball fields was signed with The Newhall Land and Farming Company on January 15, 1964 and ran to September 30, 1968. The lease was extended to June 30, 1969 to allow for the 1969 season.

A lease was then entered into with Tabernacle Baptist Church located on Concord Boulevard in Concord to support the 1970 season. On July 1, 1969, a new location was secured in Avon from the Phillips Petroleum Company near Arnold Industrial Way when the League entered into a new lease for land on which to build ball fields on refinery property.

A few years later, approximately 1974, the State claimed the property where the fields were located to enable the construction of Highway 4. JOBBL was forced to relocate north to its present location. Eight fields were constructed at that time. The Phillips Petroleum Company was purchased by Lion Oil Company and Lion assumed JOBBL's lease on April 1, 1976. Over the years, there have been several owners of the refinery property. They have included Tosco Corporation, Ultramar Diamond Shamrock, Valero Corporation, Tesoro Refinery and currently, Marathon Oil Company. Over the years, the refinery owners have provided a solid base of support to JOBBL and its participants.

In 1963, the year of its beginning, Tom Ulmer and Dino Pulos, along with other volunteers, were responsible for organizing the League. Ray Thomas drew up plans for construction of the baseball diamonds. During the 1963 season, JOBBL sponsored two divisions: The "Majors" for boys 10 to 12 years of age and the "Minors" for boys 8 to 10 years of age. There were 17 boys on each team, six teams in each division. Ray Thomas was instrumental in setting up the rules of play, which with some modification are still in use today.

A few years later, a girls program was added under the direction of Betty Cole. Over the years, at various times, additional acreage was added to allow for new fields and facilities. Currently, there are fifteen fields; ten boys' and five girls' fields for a total of approximately forty acres. There have been several entrances to the complex over the years, but present access is through a gate located at the corner of Laura Alice Way and Nelson Avenue. All regular-season games are played at the JOBBL complex.

As enrollment grew over the years, new divisions were added to both the boys and girls programs. Players now range in ages from five through fourteen. One reason that sets JOBBL apart from other local leagues is the fact that the Cal Ripkin Division (ages 5-12) and the Softball Division (ages 5-12), have an age spread of only two years per Division and every player is guaranteed three innings of play per game. The boys Babe Ruth Division, ages 13-15, and the 14/16&Under Softball Division have a three-year spread,

but they, too, guarantee three innings of play to each player. The playing age for the Sr. Babe Ruth Division is 16-18.

Another well-known feature that sets JOBL apart from other leagues is its Snack-Shack. It is the envy of many once they have occasion to visit the facility.

In addition to its regular-season play, JOBL hosts an annual after-season invitational tournament for its various divisions and at times, hosts state and regionals Babe Ruth tournaments.

In the late 1990's JOBL made a momentous decision to affiliate its 13-15 year old program with a national organization – the Babe Ruth League. A few years later, it expanded that affiliation to include the Cal Ripken division for its 5 through 12 year old boys program and the Softball program for its girls, ages 5 through 18. Joining the Babe Ruth Softball Program has been very exciting for JOBL as it has sent several teams to World Series play since the start of its affiliation. Additionally, many boys and girls teams have participated in various district, state and regional tournaments.

The Babe Ruth organization offers several age groups an after-season tournament trail where winners advance. Boys: 7-8's, 9's, 10's, 11's, 12's, 13's, 14's, 13-15's and 16-18's; Girls: 12&Under and 14/16&Under. Babe Ruth also offers a national invitational for the 10&Under and 14&Under divisions. Each year, JOBL sends teams to these very exciting tournaments.

Over the years, JOBL has added many benefits to its program. Included in its registration fees are participation awards for all players, as well as individual trophies to first and second place winners in each division.

After the 2001 spring season, JOBL added a Fall Ball Program. The boys program was initiated in 2001 and the 2002 season saw the addition of the girls program. Fall Ball is a great opportunity for players who will move up the following spring to a new division to get a head start on playing on a bigger diamond with new rules.

One of our most exciting features is that while JOBL has had traveling teams for many years, the past few years has seen JOBL convert its traveling programs for the boys and girls divisions to year-around play: Glory for the girls and Patriots for the boys. After the regular-season play, each year Glory and Patriot teams travel to various sites for tournament play, as well as to the district, state, regional and world series play offered by Babe Ruth.