

Why PONY League Baseball?

There has been a lot of confusion in the community lately about the differences between Laguna Niguel's PONY League Baseball program and the more recent "Juniors" program offered by Little League. The programs are not related. Both programs are for players of league age 13-14 and both are excellent programs. They both serve the purpose of bettering our kids and improving their baseball skills, and to that end, they are very worthwhile. However, we believe that our program offers the better alternative for players of this age for a number of reasons, as detailed below.

Field Size

The game of baseball cannot be played as it was intended to be played if the physical capability of the players does not match the physical achievements required for the game. The **Little League** program uses two diamond sizes. Up until age 12 the game is played on a 60-foot diamond with a pitching distance of 46 feet. **After age 13 their Juniors program uses 90 foot bases and a pitching distance of 60 feet, 6 inches - a 14 foot, 6 inch increase in pitching distance and 30 foot base path increase in ONE year!**

PONY League uses 80 foot bases and a 54 foot pitching distance, giving the players 2 years to transition to a full-sized field while their body is still growing.

The scaled down diamonds allow the players to make the plays made by the major leaguers. Home runs become a possibility. Outfielders can play in a position proportionately equal to that played by a major leaguer. The double play, squeeze play, and various strategy tactics, difficult for adults and nearly impossible for younger, smaller players on a full size diamond, become a probability rather than an impossibility.

Participation & Boundaries

Laguna Niguel's PONY League baseball program is one of the oldest leagues in the City, founded in 1974. While the Little League program also started in the early 1970's, their Junior League Programs are a relatively new addition to south Orange County. Rancho Niguel's Little League (RNLL) has offer juniors for a few years, while Laguna Niguel Little League (LNLL) has never offered the program before this year.

In addition, the Juniors programs of LNLL and RNLL are restricted to "Little League" boundaries by their national charter. PONY draws from the communities of Laguna Niguel, Aliso Viejo, Mission Viejo, Lake Forest, Laguna Hills, Laguna Beach and San Juan Capistrano.

The result? **PONY draws from a deeper talent pool and plays more competitive baseball.** Don't take our word for it. Ask some local coaches and private instructors.

Last year, Laguna Niguel's PONY program attracted enough talented players to fill **9 full teams** and was fortunate enough to attract some very talented Little League All-Stars and club players from the surrounding six communities. In contrast, **the RNLL program had 3 teams. The new LNLL program stands to dilute this local Laguna Niguel pool of talent even further.**

Tryouts & Cuts

Just like Little League, PONY has tryouts in early January and then holds a draft of all registered players. Should all players not be drafted (i.e., not enough to fill another full team), we have a waiting list. Last year, we were successful in placing all 5 un-drafted players from our waiting list on a team by mid-season. **Like Juniors, there are no "cuts" in PONY. We try to get everyone on a team.**

Tournaments & All-Stars

One of the nice things about PONY League is that it is a lot more relaxed than other Leagues. Don't believe us? Ask your neighbors who have played.

Anyone who has been through the Little League experience knows about the pressures (and fun!) of the annual Tournament of Champions (TOC) event and the jockeying for spots on the All-Star teams that follows.

PONY is a **lot** more laid-back.

We do not have a Tournament of Champions (TOC) tournament. Instead, each Spring we enter two teams into a local, **Memorial Day Tournament** hosted by Irvine PONY. It typically draws 100+ teams from all over the southwest United States and Mexico. Our teams are comprised not necessarily of All-Stars, but of those kids who are available to play on a holiday weekend and simply want to have some fun. Again, **the emphasis is on having fun**. (By the way, **we took first place** in both the 13u and 14u divisions!)

Facilities

PONY League has an excellent and long-standing relationship with the City of Laguna Niguel. They have been very good to us over the years about providing ample field time for our teams. **The majority of our games are played on the state-of-the-art synthetic turf field at La Paz Park.**

Who plays PONY League Baseball?

There are currently over 375 Major League Baseball players who are graduates of PONY Baseball. Mark McGuire, Tony Gwynn, Alex Rodriguez, Kevin Appier and J.T. Snow are just a few.

Mike Witt's Opinion

Still not convinced? Recently, Laguna Niguel PONY League parent/coach, and former Angels baseball great, **Mike Witt** had this to say about our League:

"I believe that PONY baseball is a much better transition to high school baseball than playing in the Juniors division of Little League. The speed of the game is more realistic in PONY ball, i.e., pitching, running, hitting, and fielding. All happen at a more rapid pace on a smaller field thus making the players react and perform at a quicker rate. If players can perform and react at a quicker rate in games and practices over the course of 3 to 4 months, they will become better players. When they transition to high school ball, the distances will be negligible, but the PONY player will have better reaction times than players from the Juniors division.

I have one more son coming up through Little League and he will definitely be playing PONY when he is a 13 year old.

Sincerely,

Mike Witt
Pitcher, California Angels 1981-1990"