

For starters, I hear this question ALL the time: what exactly is "competitive baseball" for a kid under the age of 9???

First, what it doesn't mean:

That your child has to be an "elite" player at age 7 or 8 years old
That you will be traveling all over the state
That you will lose all your free time to baseball 5+ nights per week
That it is going to cost thousands of dollars now or in the future

So what does it mean?

Your child will play more games, with more 'real baseball' rules than Pinto
Your child will likely get a higher level of instruction and competition than in Pinto
Games and practices usually comprise 3 nights (occasional weekend mornings) total per week
Your child will have the opportunity to play with dedicated players from Wilb & Hampden only
Your child will get substantial playing time, and have at-bats every game, per the league rules
We play in the JLS-Springfield league and you don't have to travel far (last years's U9 teams were: Springfield, Agawam, Longmeadow, EL, etc)
You won't have to pay 'elite' fees for this team, it has never been over \$150 to play.

How can I tell if my child should tryout for U9 competitive baseball?

First, your child cannot be 9 years old *before* May 1st of that calendar year in which he or she is playing
If your child likes playing the game of baseball
If your child wants to learn more rules and play "real" baseball
If your child can hit live pitching reasonably well (better than the average Pinto player)
If your child can throw and catch reasonably well (better than the average Pinto player)
If your child is mature enough to be engaged in the game when on the field, and not cause distractions when off it
It is competitive, so there are wins and losses - outs and strikeouts - and your child needs to be prepared for that. (We do our best to place teams in divisions which are in accordance with the overall team's skill level each year).

Will my child be 'left behind' if he or she does not play U9 competitive baseball?

Absolutely not. Every year we have many kids who move from Pinto to our town's Grade 3/4 Suburban (recreational) baseball division, and some to the Under-11 competitive teams as well. And those kids learn the game as they go, according to the overall level of the team on which they are placed.

Lastly, trying out for the U9 team(s) is no-risk: if in the event your child is not chosen for a team during the evaluation process in the fall, you will get your money back and the opportunity to register and play again in the spring recreational league (Pinto or Grade 3/4). Plus the tryouts may give you a better indication of the skill level required for the following year, if your child is age eligible and wants to tryout again. If you feel that your child

is ready to move on, then we at the Wilbraham Baseball Committee would love to see him or her there! I hope this clears up some questions you may have, but if you have any others, feel free to contact me any time!

-Bobby O'Neil
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