

Minnetonka Big Willow Baseball Association

January 5, 2009

Dear Big Willow Parents, Players, Sponsors, Patrons, and Friends:

First, I want to thank you all for your continued support. Without you, our program would not be where it is today.

Big Willow has always been one of the premier baseball leagues in the area. We are very lucky to have a great sense of community at the fields. No matter what level your son/daughter is playing at, or what field they are competing on, you are sure to run in to friends, old and new, during practices, games, and other special events.

I am very lucky to be on the Board of Directors with an ambitious group of volunteers who reflect the vision and encourage Big Willow's mission:

“...Players will be encouraged to develop a love of baseball through quality instruction that emphasizes friendship, teamwork, good sportsmanship, respect for self and others, development of baseball skills and strategies, and family involvement....”

As a Board, we try to recruit coaches who share those same values. This season we will be offering coaches clinics to help our coaches learn more about coaching youth baseball, setting realistic goals, and learning practice drills to reinforce skills.

Even though we have enjoyed many successes, we are not without our challenges. Big Willow Baseball has seen a slight decline in overall enrollment over the past few years due to competition with other sports and extra-curricular activities. Our biggest challenge, at the current time, is increasing enrollment. Recent marketing efforts have focused on recruiting new players and increasing Big Willow's visibility outside of Eastern Minnetonka and Hopkins. Unlike Little League, Big Willow does not have geographic restrictions and we have found a number of players and families that prefer our facilities and “brand” of baseball compared to other leagues in the area.

Some of the differences include:

- Big Willow teams bat all players on a team. Little league can bat only 9, meaning some kids sit out more than 1 inning at a time.
- Big Willow allows players to play either with their grade level or their "league-age" based on their age on May 1st each year.
- Big Willow Majors games are played on larger fields than Little League (72-foot bases and 52' from home plate to the pitchers' mound). We also allow runners to lead off in the Majors Division.
- Big Willow is a private organization, allowing us the flexibility to modify our rules over the years to accommodate different groups of players. This flexibility is meant to provide a more enjoyable experience for players and families.

Please help us in spreading the word about Big Willow Baseball.

Returning families will notice some major improvements in our facilities from last season. Last fall, we installed turf in all 4 batting cages. We also invested in new pitching screens, mats, and nets. With help from the City of Minnetonka, we also refurbished all 3 infields. Big Willow will also benefit from the City of Minnetonka's Parks Renewal Program in the near future. The city will be replacing the playground equipment and adding approximately 15 well-needed parking spaces. Over the next few seasons we will discuss replacing our dugouts and improvements to our concession stand.

Last season, we sent out a survey to all Big Willow families after our season. We received great feedback and are implementing many of the suggestions this coming season. Our Mites division will see the biggest change with more scheduled practices, coaches clinics, a slightly later start to the season, and a reduction in the number of the games played compared to last season. Division Managers at all levels will work with their coaches to ensure consistency of expectations and a complete understanding of the rules for each division.

Every season Big Willow loses valuable volunteers as children get older. We are always looking for motivated volunteers to join us in making Big Willow a great experience for all of the families involved. If you have an interest in joining our Board of Directors, coaching, sponsoring, or assisting with some of our special events, please contact any of our current Board members for information.

Our 2009 season will officially kick-off Sunday May 3rd with our traditional Opening Day Ceremonies. Our season will end July 1st on "Championship Wednesday", as we crown the 2009 Majors and Farm Division Championship teams. Please bookmark Big Willow's homepage (www.bigwillow.org) and check back often for the latest news.

As the president of Big Willow Baseball, I will work hard to ensure the 2009 season is enjoyable and instructive for all involved. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me anytime via email at president@bigwillow.org

I look forward to seeing you all this Spring/Summer!

Scott Condon
President
Minnetonka Big Willow Baseball Association