

Little League enters new era

From A13

games in and then the Opening Day ceremonies. It's not supposed to rain until later in the day."

Until then, there will plenty of fun activities for everyone to enjoy. Like a cookout with food being donated by Stew Leonard's. Or a home run hitting contest after the ceremonies. Or a booth sponsored by Team Mattingly, Don Mattingly's new equipment business.

And if that's not enough, 87-year-old Lou D'Orso, a baseball icon in this city for three-quarters of a century and one of the original founders of the American Little League, will be on hand to throw out the ceremonial first pitch.

D'Orso is just one example of how the Norwalk Little League is staying connected with the city's glorious past on the diamond.

You see, while the league is new, much of the old, traditional flavor from the three original Little Leagues — which have 155 years of history between them — remain.

"What we did at the 11-12-year-old level was form two divisions," Hefferan said. "One division is the Ben Whone Division and another division is the Babe Spinola Division."

"And the 9-10-year-old division is called the International Division. So we've kept the names of all three Little Leagues."

What's more, the new league will use the baseball diamonds formerly used by the three Little Leagues: the two in Broad River that the Ben Whone LL used, the two at Brookside School the Babe Spinola Little League played on, and the lighted field at Calf Pasture where the International LL played for years (the two softball fields at Calf will return to normal after this weekend).

All three leagues are also well represented on the Norwalk LL board.

Kevin Crowley, formerly of Ben Whone, is commissioner

of the Major Division. Mario Salomone and Vinny Incantapulo, the longtime president and vice president of the International Little League, are now the commissioner and assistant commissioner of the International Division for 9-10-year-olds, according to Hefferan.

Billy Spinola, the former president of the league named after his father, is on the board of directors.

So is his wife, Penny, another longtime officer from the Spinola American LL, and Rocco Cundari, who ran the Major Division there for many years.

"We have approximately 25 people on our board representing all three leagues," Hefferan pointed out.

"We tried to include as many baseball people as we could."

Like Jimmy Benincaso, who spent many years in the International LL and is now commissioner of the 8-9-year-old division as well as vice president of the overall league.

"Some of us wear two hats," Hefferan noted.

Larry Halloran, another International LL staple, is the chief umpire. Many of the coaches from the three leagues, including 14 who coached in Norwalk International last year, are now coaching in the Norwalk Little League.

And, of course, Hefferan himself comes from the Ben Whone National Little League. But he's not the only one who's excited about the new league in town.

"I'm very excited about it," said Scott Miller, now in his 10th year as the Connecticut District I administrator and a former Norwalk resident. "I plan to attend Saturday's festivities. I want to congratulate the group for all the work they've done to make this possible."

"Merging three leagues into one is no easy deed, but I think Steve (Hefferan) was the right guy for the job. He had the vision for what it's supposed to be. It's a sizable group he's

running, but with his leadership he's really done a great job."

Miller is also quick to point out that Norwalk still has another Little League in town.

"We have not forgotten the Rowayton Little League," he said. "They're going to still be involved in inter-league play. They will be the 10th team in the major division. Norwalk Little League has nine teams and Rowayton will be the 10th team. They will rotate in the schedule. They're going to do that at the 11-12 year-old level and at the 9-10 year-old level."

"So they're going to be involved with us and still keep their identity," Miller added. "Rowayton has a strong identity. They do a lot down there and they're actually expanding to softball this year. They have a great league, they have numbers, and they have a beautiful field. So I think it's important Rowayton keeps their identity."

And, remember, Norwalk has two other youth baseball leagues in town, the Cal Ripken League in West Norwalk and the Cranbury League. For years, they've cut into the player enrollment of the local Little Leagues.

"It's very unusual for one town to have all three. Usually a town has only one," Hefferan pointed out.

"I believe there's only two towns in the Northeast, us and one other town, that have that situation."

But starting this season, beginning this week, the new Norwalk Little League has taken a major step in strengthening Little League baseball in the city.

Sounds like a winner to me. "I think if you took a poll of parents," Hefferan said, "you'd find 95 to 100 percent of them are all for this."

And many of them will be at Calf Pasture on Saturday.

"I'm really looking forward to it," Miller said.

"It's going to be quite a celebration."

Yes, there's still nothing quite like Opening Day.



Hour photo/MATTHEW VINCI

Weston catcher Danielle Tolkin can only watch as Stratford's Katie Frusciante scores on a fifth-inning RBI double by her sister, Kelly, during Thursday's game. The visiting Devils beat Weston, 4-0.

Trojans blanked by Devils

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few weeks to try and lock up a postseason berth.

"We have a really close team and we've all been working really hard during practices and throughout games," she said.

Link kept the Red Devils off the scoreboard until the fourth and fifth innings when they broke through for one and two runs, respectively.

Aquilino reached on an infield hit and moved to second on a wild pitch. Potter sacrificed and Allison Hermann slapped an RBI single to center. Link escaped further damage when Kamia Pettway hit a line drive back to Link and she threw to first to complete a double play.

"This was one of our better games defensively," said Lustberg, who also praised the defense of Wilbanks, Caley Quinn and Ashley Castillo in the outfield.

Bianca Samson led off the fifth by getting hit by a pitch and she took second on a wild pitch. After a strikeout, Kellie Frusciante hit a fly ball into right center just out of the reach of Castillo for an RBI double.

"If she would've made that

play, it would've been a great catch," Lustberg said. "She ran a long way and it just hit off the end of her glove."

Following a groundout, Frusciante came home on an RBI single to left off the bat of Lopez to round out the scoring. Link, a sophomore and one of the better hitters on the team, allowed three earned runs on five hits with two walks and four strikeouts but was no match for Potter on this day, not many pitchers are on any day. Potter retired nine straight going into the seventh before hitting senior co-captain Liz Ogiba with a pitch to lead off the inning. She regrouped to retire the next three batters and preserve the shutout.

"This was one of our better games," Stratford coach Bob Baird said. "Carrie has been outstanding pitching this year and this was the first game Nicole Vena hasn't gotten a hit this year. But she scored a run and we've scored in the first inning of every game we've played."

"Weston is vastly improved," added Baird, who is also the general manager of the highly successful Brakettes amateur softball squad. "Dave is doing a great job with his team."

Lustberg thinks his team will turn the corner soon.

"We have more than enough winnable games left to qualify for the state tournament," he said. "We still have to go out and win them but if we play solid like this, I think we will."

Stratford 4, Weston 0

Stratford	AB	R	H	BI
Nicole Vena, c	4	1	0	0
Yareliz Lopez, ss	2	0	1	1
Amanda Aquilino, 2b	2	1	1	0
Carrie Potter, p	1	0	0	0
Allison Hermann, 1b	3	0	1	1
Kamia Pettway, 3b	1	0	0	0
Bianca Samson, rf	2	0	1	0
Katie Frusciante, pr	0	1	0	0
Kristi Peal, lf	3	0	0	0
Kellie Frusciante, cf	3	1	1	1
Totals	21	4	5	3

Weston	AB	R	H	BI
Brooke Wilbanks, cf	2	0	1	0
Daria Heffer, dp	3	0	0	0
Arielle Link, p	3	0	0	0
Liz Ogiba, 3b	2	0	0	0
Caley Quinn, lf	3	0	0	0
Ashley Cordisco, 2b	3	0	0	0
Ashley Castillo, rf	3	0	0	0
Danielle Tolkin, c	1	0	0	0
Kelli Fredrickson, ph	1	0	0	0
Julianne Funk, ss	2	0	0	0
Sarah O'Donoghue, 1b	0	0	0	0
Ashley Dittmar, 1b	0	0	0	0
Totals	23	0	1	0

Innings	123	456	7	R	H	E
Stratford	001	020	0	4	5	1
Weston	000	000	0	0	1	1

2B: S-Kellie Frusciante, SAC: S-Pettway 2, Lopez, Potter. HBP: S-Samson, W-Ogiba. LOB: Stratford 3, Weston 4.

Pitcher	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO
Stratford						
Potter (W, 6-3)	7	1	0	0	1	12
Weston						
Link (L, 1-3)	7	5	4	3	2	4

Headley, Roda among Westport honorees

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sive coordinator with the Princeton Day School football team in Princeton, N.J., where he currently resides. Headley will be starting his fifth season with the football team this fall, and he is currently in his second season as the head varsity golf coach at Princeton Day.

In 1994, Headley was inducted into the Wake Forest University Hall of Fame, while in '95 he received the Distinguished American Award from the Delaware Valley Chapter of the National Football Foundation and College Hall of Fame. He was also recognized in 2000 with the Mike Campbell Lifetime Achievement Award from the All-American Football Foundation.

Headley is employed as a personal trainer with the Princeton Fitness and Wellness Center in addition to his coaching duties at Princeton Day School.

Roda, a former football player at Andrew Warde High School in the early 1980s, has been a coach in the Westport

PAL Football program since 1996. During that time he has coached five different teams to league championships, and several seasons coached more than one team at different age levels. His resume includes four straight league crowns from 2001-04, and another in 2006. His teams also finished division runner-up in 1997, '98, 2004 and '05.

In addition to coaching, Roda joined PAL Football's Board of Trustees in 1998 and currently serves as president and chairman of the board, overseeing an organization that in 2006 included 14 tackle football teams, another eight flag football teams, and six cheerleading squads for a total of 410 children that are served by PAL.

In 2000, Roda was one of the co-founders of the Fairfield County Football League and has been a member of the executive board ever since, taking over as president of the FCFL in 2005.

He is also a member of the Board of Trustees of the West-

port Police Athletic League, and in 2005 was appointed to the Board of Directors of the Staples High School Gridiron Club. He is also an Executive Board Member of the Westport Field of Dreams Committee.

Last October, Roda was honored as the Westport Sports Person of the Year by the Fairfield County Sports Commission at its second annual SportsNight awards.

Born in Norwalk and now a resident of West Haven, Roda is currently a probation officer for the state of Connecticut judicial branch, and in that role has conducted presentations to Staples High School senior health classes.

Tickets to the Dinner of Champions, which begins at 6 p.m., are \$45 and can be purchased at the following Westport locations: Settlers and Traders Real Estate (215 Post Road West), Junior's Hot Dog Stand (265 Riverside Ave.), The Red Barn (292 Wilton Road), and at Staples High School by contacting Karen DeFelice at 341-1365.

Pistons go up 3-0 against Magic

Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — Even on a night when the Detroit Pistons didn't play their best, they were good enough to beat the Orlando Magic — again.

Tayshaun Prince scored 23 points, Chauncey Billups added 21 and the Pistons defeated Orlando 93-77 Thursday night to take a 3-0 lead in the first-round playoff series.

The victory ended a postseason trend for the Pistons — they had lost their last six Game 3s when leading 2-0 — and left them one victory from advancing to the second round.

NBA PLAYOFFS

Game 4 is Saturday in Orlando.

Detroit gave the Magic plenty of chances in this one. The Pistons trailed early, let Orlando be physical and seemingly got flustered as they were whistled for three technical fouls. Leading scorer Richard Hamilton even had an off night, scoring 10 points on 2-of-11 shooting.

But Detroit made up for it with solid outside shooting from Prince, Billups and Rasheed Wallace.

The Pistons finished 8-of-13 from behind the arc. Wallace, who had 15 points, was 3-for-3. Prince was 3-for-5, and Billups was 2-for-3.

Jameer Nelson, a defensive liability at times in the first two games, led the Magic with 27 points on 10-of-19 shooting. Dwight Howard, who lacked energy in Game 2 because of a stomach illness, had 11 points and 12 rebounds.

Grant Hill and Hedo Turkoglu, the two players who carried Orlando in the first two games, struggled at home. They were a combined 6-of-22 from the field.


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