


NEWS

A Little League of Their Own: Young Goldenites kick off baseball season

 by Corinne Westeman
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Golden Little League players hold onto a cord wrapping around the Wolf Park ballfield as they take a sportsmanship pledge during the league's April 13 Opening Day ceremony. Hundreds of players and their families celebrated the league's first-ever Opening Day ceremony with a parade of teams, ceremonial first pitches, special visitors and more. Credit: Corinne Westeman

The [Golden Junior Baseball Association](#) has revamped in the offseason — a new name, a new vision, big plans and upgraded amenities at its primary baseball field.

And local baseballers felt there was no better way to inaugurate these improvements than with a full-scale Opening Day celebration.

On April 13, hundreds of young T-ball/baseball players, their coaches, families and friends packed Pleasant View's [Wolf Park](#) to kick off their 2024 season. The 20-some teams lined the infield for a parade, followed by ceremonial first pitches, a visit from Colorado Rockies mascot Dinger and a flyover of military helicopters.

Players Hunter Williford and Cody Krajewski, 11 and 10, respectively, both said the flyover was their favorite part.

They said the league typically hosts an end-of-season barbecue for participants but — as President Mike Griffeth confirmed — this was the first time the league has formally celebrated Opening Day. The players and Griffeth hoped it'd become a tradition.

As Griffeth told the crowded stands and infield, the GJBA is now a part of the national Little League organization. As such, it can now formally use the Little League name, and will go by Golden Junior Baseball and/or Golden Little League, he said.

Additionally, toward the end of the season, Golden will reform its teams to create all-star teams eligible to compete in the Little League tournament, Griffeth continued.



Colorado Rockies mascot Dinger high-fives a Golden Little League player April 13 at Wolf Park. Dinger made a special appearance as part of the league's first-ever Opening Day ceremony. Credit: Corinne Westeman

Several teams, especially the younger age groups, will play all or most of their games in Golden. Most teams are scheduled for 18 regular-season games, although that's subject to change due with weather.

Griffeth said many teams will play the bulk of their games at Wolf Park, which was recently revamped with new bases, new dirt, a new outfield fence and more. Also, parents can now sign up to announce games and teams can sign up to run the concession stand.

The goal is to create a stronger community atmosphere, he said, as parents and coaches have continually asked. Also, by announcing the games, he hoped it would enhance the players' Game Day experience.

While much about the league has changed, its heart is unchanged. Griffeth emphasized sportsmanship to the players, saying he always wants them to continue growing as baseball players and people.

"Do your best," he said.

Eric Ahrens, a parent who's been coaching T-ball/coach-pitch baseball for three years, remarked how special the Opening Day ceremony was. On top of being a perfect day weather-wise, he said it was the last time everyone will be together until the end of the season.

Brittany Ahrens added how the event was a great opportunity to inspire her 5-year-old son and his peers, saying, "It's exciting (for them) to see the older kids participating too."

Along with the older GJBA players, a few Golden High School and Colorado School of Mines baseball players also participated in the Opening Day festivities.

Brittany and Eric, who live in Arvada, said they grew up playing softball and baseball, respectively. They shared how the sport taught them important life lessons about how to handle ups and downs, wins and losses.

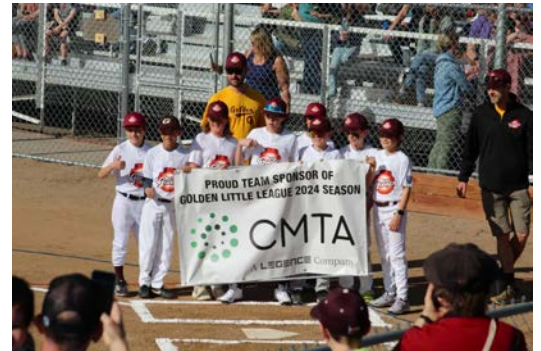
They said they signed their son up to learn many of those same lessons, describing how coaches uniquely help reinforce those lessons and encourage the players.

Hunter, who's played baseball for three or four years, said he's moved up from the minor leagues to the majors so he can continue playing with his older friends. He loves hitting and pitching, and has really enjoyed learning how to hit fastballs and curveballs.

Meanwhile, Cody is starting his third season in the league and plays in the minors. He said he loves the thrill of batting, saying that one of the most important lessons he's learned so far is "to not be afraid of the ball."



Golden Little League players, coaches and supporters wave at a military helicopter flyover during the April 13 Opening Day ceremony at Wolf Park. Two military helicopters flew down from Wyoming to help the league celebrate its first-ever Opening Day ceremony. Credit: Corinne Westeman



A Golden Little League team participates in the April 13 Opening Day parade around the Wolf Park ballfield. Dozens of teams across all age groups lined the infield for the parade. Credit: Corinne Westeman

Click through additional photos from the Opening Day ceremony here:



Golden Little League players and the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office mounted patrol unit remove their hats for the national anthem during the league's April 13 Opening Day ceremony. Hundreds of players and their families celebrated the league's first-ever Opening Day ceremony with a parade of teams, ceremonial first pitches, special visitors and more. Credit: Corinne Westeman



Golden Little League players examine first base during the April 13 Opening Day ceremony at Wolf Park. As part of the celebration, all the league's teams paraded around the infield. Credit: Corinne Westeman



Golden Little League players, coaches and supporters wave at at Wolf Park. Two military helicopters flew down from Wyoming Credit: Corinne Westeman